



*You are not by yourself, you  
are not alone through your  
challenges in life.*

FALL 2022 - WINTER 2023

Read more of Claudia's story inside.



# Resident Story

*We had the opportunity to hear the story of Claudia, one of our residents. Her positive attitude and overall love of her life was a beautiful testimony to what we are doing at The Dwelling Place, and how it is impacting generations to come.*

My childhood was rough, but I had a loving family. I was abused when I was a kid by my cousin, sexually abused. I didn't say nothing. We moved a lot, my dad was a felon, he stole a lot and did a lot of criminal activity so we moved a lot to different places. I was hardheaded and stubborn. I did my own thing. I had my own rules in life. My parents disciplined me but I still did me. My mom put me in jail to teach me a lesson. I cried for that little hour or two, then went back to my old ways. My childhood was, I guess, not a normal childhood, but it was decent.

When I grew up, I wanted to be married, I wanted to have multiple kids. I wanted to be a nurse, so I went to school for nursing but after I went through the internship, I said, "No, this is not for me!" I wanted to travel and I did that in my 20's. I traveled to different states before I had kids to learn and grow. During that time, I thought this is love, right here, this is freedom this is what I wanna feel like!

I met my abuser my sophomore year in high school. I was instantly in love with him, butterflies and nervousness. Every time he walked into a classroom, I just walked away, went to the other side. My teachers and friends were like, "don't mess with him, he's a bad influence" and I said, "I love bad boys! Look at that face!"

The first time he ever abused me was in June 2010. I ignored the red flags, saying "No, he wouldn't do that to me!" He didn't do it again for a couple years until he started using drugs. When he started hitting me, I just bypassed it. I lost my dignity, my confidence... I lost a lot, but I stuck with it. I felt like I had hope so that he could change in different ways, but he just got worse. I finally left when I found out I was pregnant with my daughter. I was literally deciding, "do I tell my abuser or don't I?" I didn't want my daughter at first, but God gave her to me for a reason. Cindy, my case worker, called me and asked me why I want to be here [at The Dwelling Place], and I told her, I don't know, I just don't know yet.

When the pandemic happened, at that time, God was telling me to keep calling and reaching out. I kept pushing to get here. When I moved in, I got scared and I was having some anger problems and challenges within myself. I wanted to leave within that first 30 days. I thought, "I can't do this! It's too many rules!" In time, I learned that it's good boundaries and it is good way to love and have a sisterhood pact with people that have been through what you've been through. You're not by yourself, you're not alone through your challenges in life.

My kids are survivors. My kids are strong and they made me have courage to stand up for them. When we first got to The Dwelling Place, they were nervous and scared, they used to

hate each other and just didn't trust people. But they opened up and they trust people around them. Right now to this day they are crazy, loving, funny, caring, very sensitive to others, and they speak more. They still have some little behaviors but it's minor and it's a work in progress. You can see how they're loving and caring. It was good they felt safe here.

My favorite part of TDP was the sisterhood bond we had in my house. We trusted each other, we love each other, we



cry together, we laugh together and we do sisterhood things together. Even when people move on, we still keep in contact and do things as a family. This is the most memorable part that I love. I love that we could change each other and push each other to strive and give encouragement, but at the same time we speak the truth to each other, even if we can't handle it or we're mad at each other. We build that bond in love to be more like God.

I am currently working for a home care business where I take care of vulnerable adults. I go to their homes and help them if they need food or clothes or if they need help cleaning their house or anything. They're helping me learn from my dad's mistakes and to love people the way they are and how God made them. Everybody has a story. Everybody has their own issues but it has taught me to actually listen, understand them and watch them strive for their own goals as well. They encourage me to do better.

The challenges you have to deal with are hard. You have to take ownership with what you did in your past and know that God forgave you through it and that you're loved. I didn't know how to do that or receive love, but I strived through it. I'm thankful, because I still could have been in that bad situation I was in, just suffering, not knowing what to do and *not* breaking those generational cycles and those generational curses.

*Pray with us, as we lift up our current residents on their unique journeys, that they find hope, healing and the love of Jesus Christ in each step. Pray that they continue to grow in their faith, and guide their families in love and peace.*

# Q&A WITH THE E.D.



A conversation with Meagan Struck, TDP Development Director and LeNae Williamson, TDP Executive Director.

**MEAGAN:** As you reflect on your first two years as the Executive Director, what are you most encouraged to see happening at The Dwelling Place? What has been the most rewarding?

**LENAE:** One of the major shifts in the ministry that is very exciting is that we have moved from a time-based program to a goal-based program. This determination came from listening to several of our alumni. They shared with us that during the first 6 months or so, the women felt safe, and started to relax and experience respite. Just past the half-way point of that first year, they found themselves more focused on where they would be going next; their anxiety returned and they stopped being able to focus as much on their healing.

The gift of time is so powerful! By shifting to a goal based approach we are communicating to the women that we are committed to their healing process, and we are with them on their journey. As long as they are indeed working on their goals and making progress, we give them the gift of time. What does this mean for TDP? You may see the total number of people served in our residential program decrease but you will see families graduating TDP ready and able to be independent and take care of themselves and their children. Healing from trauma and

abuse takes longer than desired, but the breaking of the abuse cycle is absolutely worth every dollar invested.

**M:** In your role, you have the opportunity to see and interact with the women and children regularly. What type of challenges do you see them facing before coming to TDP, and during their healing journey?

**L:** For many it centers around the lack of community. Everyone's story is unique but many have been isolated from family and friends. They may not have been able to be completely honest with people in their lives out of fear and shame. They also tend to have issues around trust, which makes it difficult for them to be open to a relationship with Jesus, as well as staff members and other residents. All of the women have experienced multiple forms of

**M:** Can you share more about the barriers women & children have for success?

**L:** Many of our residents have never been given the opportunity to learn what you and I might consider 'basic life skills' such as driving, managing a budget, writing a resume, job interview skills, how to utilize community resources, problem solving, time management, organization, parenting skills and even healthy recreation. There are limited job training opportunities or experiences. They may have had these skills at one time but the effects of complex trauma and fear on their brain has paralyzed them to various degrees making it very

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trauma which affects their ability to navigate the barriers that will need to overcome. The Dwelling Place needs to be the place where abuse ends and healing begins. The kind of healing that includes their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

difficult for them to navigate the basic problems faced each day. On top of this, many moms and their children are navigating underlying mental or physical health problems that are likely caused, at least in part, by their abuse. In their efforts towards living safely



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and independently, our residents deal with a number of challenges in addition to escaping from domestic abuse, including transportation and mental health issues, limited life skills and experiences, children's mental health and special needs, affordable housing, and livable wage issues.

**M: How is TDP equipped to support women in these challenges?**

**L:** Shortly after becoming a resident at The Dwelling Place, all women walk through a skills assessment and goal planning process to help determine what skills might be needed by each woman. Between classes and one-on-one case management, along with special group activities, we determine a course of action and give opportunities for them to grow in each area. These goals are reevaluated on a regular basis to update and determine if further action is necessary.

**M: Is there a particular experience or story you would like to share of how you have seen women overcome these challenges during their time at TDP?**

**L:** There really are so many but one of the most surprising ones to me was quite simple. I mentioned earlier

about learning healthy recreation. This includes learning to how to enjoy and play with their children. Watching a young mom who really didn't have the energy nor the know-how to interact with her children or be child-like with them. She made sure they were fed and cared for but that's all she knew to do. During her time at TDP, I saw

progressively that she was learning how her children responded differently when she started to listen to them, got down on the floor to play with them, blew bubbles and other simple things. How these simple changes have positively effected both her and her children has been beautiful to watch.

**M: What are you most looking forward to in the next year at TDP?**

**L:** By far, it would have to be seeing just how Jesus will show up in the day-to-day challenges within the ministry. He is infinitely creative, and when we pay attention, we can find

Him in everything, from the very minute details as well as the landslide victories. As a staff, we spend a lot of time praying and asking the Lord to



show us how to meet and overcome the obstacles each family faces. We are not a cookie cutter operation nor could we ever be. Each family is so unique and deserves the effort made, in partnership with the Father, to find the path forward that will unlock the power of hope in their hearts. We often do not have the answers but knowing the ONE who does is what makes it possible. It is not easy to be patient but it is always exciting to see Him work.

*Meagan Strunk*  
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

*Will you give today?*

**Our donors and volunteers are pivotal to the mission of freeing women and children from abuse in order to reclaim their identity in Christ.** If you feel led to invest in the ongoing transformation of women and children at TDP, please consider a gift today. You can **give online** at [thedwellingplacemn.org/give](http://thedwellingplacemn.org/give) or by filling out the enclosed envelope using any of these options:

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# News & Updates

God has so many wonderful things in motion through our ministry. It has been a joy to see new move-ins, graduations... so much learning and growing in faith. The marketing side has been hard at work behind the scenes in preparation of the new look of The Dwelling Place that will be showing up in October.

The new design, we incorporated the heart from the existing logo with the an outer house shape. But more than just plopping a heart in the middle of a house, we wanted to integrate the two to show how the ideas of shelter and a loving community are truly interwoven at The Dwelling Place. The house has been smoothed and is bending and flexing itself into the shape of a heart on the interior. It almost appears like

two arms reaching around and giving the heart a hug.

We will be slowly changing the logo in all of our channels and showing off an all new set of colors, looks and, most importantly, real talk about what God is doing in the lives of the survivors of domestic abuse.

A new website is also in the works and will be showing up in the coming weeks! This will be an important resource for future survivors to find information

they need to thrive in life or apply to our program. It will also be a great place for you, our advocates, to get and stay connected, learn about our program and our mission, and read stories of success from graduates of The Dwelling Place. It is because of your generous support that we are able to do reach people through Christ and help end these generational cycles of abuse. Thank you for being an integral part of our mission.



# Volunteer Opportunities

## Volunteering looks different for everyone.

The little acts of kindness have a ripple effect. Volunteers at The Dwelling Place leave a lasting impact on the women and children they serve. Some volunteers are gifted in music, art or sports. They teach, encourage and lead our residents to find things they love. Others love working with their hands and find joy in building projects, mowing lawns or helping with general maintenance.

Volunteers offer the gift of their time to listen, inspire, grow and learn. The value of their work knows no limit. Thank you for being part of our volunteer teams.

Sign up to be contacted about volunteer opportunities at [thedwellingplacemn.org/volunteer](http://thedwellingplacemn.org/volunteer).



*Pictured above: A few members of the U of M Soccer team. They, along with other teammates provided a soccer day camp for the children of TDP.*

*It is fulfilling knowing my hands are building a future for someone other than myself; helping women who have been through what they've been through.*

*Jason Welles, renovation volunteer*