



RIGHT WHERE I BELONG

Each day at Home Sweet Home Ministries, we witness miraculous transformations rooted in your generosity, kindness, and shared belief in our mission to demonstrate Christ's love through innovative approaches that instill hope, restore lives, and build community. One such example is the inspiring story of Ethel, whose life was irrevocably changed in May 2012 when she and her husband were involved in a horrific head-on collision with a drunk driver that left them emotionally shattered.

"After our accident, neither one of us was working, so I was hitting up every food pantry in town including Home Sweet Home," shares Ethel. At HSHM, Ethel found a supportive environment that fostered healing and hope. She kept coming back more and more, creating new friends and finding a new sense of belonging.

When Home Sweet Home officially formed the Bread for Life Co-op in June 2014, Ethel eagerly became a member. She offered to help at the co-op whenever she could. Throughout the years, Ethel got hired part-time, then full-time, and now serves as the Lead Co-op Assistant.

Reflecting back Ethel recalls, "I'd often wonder why things happened the way they did. Because of that accident, God put me here. This is where I'm supposed to be, to make sure other people are fed and have purpose. Even if it's just sitting and listening to co-op members because they need somebody to talk to, this is where I do the most beneficial work. I love it here. This place is family."

Ethel continues to make big strides in the co-op, creating prepped meals once a month. "We now have co-op bowls," adds Ethel. "We take a variety of donations and prepare them together in our kitchen area and package them as meals. I'm getting ready to change it up to chicken parmesan. We try to keep mixing it up."

Another new addition that Ethel is excited about--six garden beds colorfully stationed on either side of the co-op entrance. "We're hoping to grow cilantro, basil, oregano, rosemary, bell peppers, and onions," shares Ethel. "I'm always searching for ways to add some variety and flavor for our co-op members."

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MISSION STATEMENT

Home Sweet Home Ministries demonstrates Christ's love through innovative approaches that instill hope, restore lives, and build community.



A Message from Matt

*"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."
– Isaiah 43:19*

As a 100+ year old ministry, adapting to meet the needs of the community has been an ongoing journey for Home Sweet Home Ministries. Whether it is a headline-grabbing new shelter village or a less public (but still exciting) addition of garden beds outside our food co-op, Home Sweet Home Ministries' commitment to innovation and doing "new things" shows up in all sorts of ways. We constantly find that when we apply new ideas to challenges that sometimes seem intractable, exciting things happen! Hope is kindled anew, lives are restored, and our sense of community and connection to one another grows.

While our methods of serving our neighbors may change over time, the message we convey remains the same – that each of us is created in God's image and that He loves each of us as one of his children. There truly is "Hope For All Who Enter" into a relationship with Him & with Home Sweet Home Ministries.

As you read this newsletter, I hope you share in the excitement of the "new things" going on within our ministry. May God bless you all for your faithful support.

Matt Burgess

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Welcome Writers!

At the beginning of March, Jen Woodrum and Carey Compton began a creative writing class. Meeting every Friday at The Junction, this class has brought about a profoundly impacting initiative. They've made it their mission to help people tell their stories, finding healing and peace through the power of the written word.

"Creative writing can help make meaning of your life and find purpose in it," shares Jen, a therapist and local author.

Each class, there is discussion, and opportunities to share ideas, followed by some writing time. Each participant is provided with a notebook and pen. Writers can also enjoy a slice of pizza.

"It's going very well. I feel like every session someone has some kind of epiphany," exclaims Carey, who has a master's in creative writing and works for the Bloomington Public Library.

"A lot of people don't view themselves as writers and one of the things we've done here is that we make sure that everyone that comes into the room knows that they are writers," expresses Jen. "It's important for people to feel empowered in that. You can start anywhere."

We all come from different walks of life and have our own story to tell. "Even if they don't want to share their story, it can still be of value to the writer," shares Carey. "For them to get something off their mind and make the paper hold on to it so they can do more things and not be weighed down can be very beneficial."

HSHM looks forward to sharing these powerful narratives that are being crafted. Over the next few months, Jen and Carey hope to be able to create a collection of stories from the class for others to enjoy.



Help Build The Bridge

Discover more and donate at
hshministries.org



Let's Build The Bridge Together



In February, Home Sweet Home Ministries shared plans for developing The Bridge, the community's first non-congregate emergency shelter program to provide dignity, safety, and stability for our unhoused neighbors. This innovative community will feature 48 private sleeping cabins and a central community building offering on-site support services, all staffed 24/7 by our dedicated team. In partnership with Connect Transit, a location at 104 East Oakland Avenue in Bloomington was confirmed in June. Since then, it has been a matter of securing \$2.65 million in construction costs for the program.

Home Sweet Home has been blessed to secure a grant agreement with McLean County that will provide approximately \$1.5 million in funding for the project. In addition to utilizing some capital reserve funding, HSHM has also launched our Build the Bridge campaign, with the goal of raising \$750,000.00 to cover the remaining capital developments costs of the project.

Donations to the Build The Bridge Campaign can be made:

- Online at hshministries.org/donate
 - "The Bridge" should be indicated in the Campaign box.
- By mail or in person to:
 - Home Sweet Home Ministries
303 E. Oakland Ave.
Bloomington, IL 61701
 - "The Bridge" should be indicated on the gift.

With your help, we believe The Bridge will become a beacon of hope, an embodiment of Christ's love, and a testament to the transformative power of community. Thank you!

Mark your calendars now for our annual Night In A Car fundraiser happening on **Friday, February 6th, 2026!** This impactful simulation fuels Home Sweet Home's efforts to drive out homelessness in our community. Participants "live" out of their cars during the overnight hours, getting a small glimpse of what it is like to experience homelessness.

Your participation can make a real difference. No matter if you can join us for just the evening activities or stay most or all the night, all levels of participation are welcome. Goals can start at \$250 and up, but we challenge you to raise \$1,000 per team to support the vital work of Home Sweet Home. In honor of our 10th year, our goal is to have 100 teams sign up.

Looking to jumpstart your fundraising efforts? Registration is now open. Speed your way over to nightinacar.org to sign up or learn more today. Thank you!



SAVE
THE
DATE

2026
FEB.
6

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Like Us!



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Your generous contributions played a crucial role in Ethel's transformation. Today, she stands as a shining testament to the strength of the human spirit. There are more stories, more lives in need, more restoration to undertake.

HSHM invites you to continue being a beacon of hope for those who need it most by visiting hshministries.org/donate. A soul restored, a community strengthened, and a life touched by your kindness makes all the difference. Thank you!



PARTNER WITH US FOR BIG GIVE

Home Sweet Home Ministries, Midwest Food Bank, and Thrivent are busy preparing for Big Give and we need your help! We are looking for churches, youth groups, schools, and businesses to get involved. Big Give occurs in September and October. We are asking you to collect items for meal boxes that we will distribute during Thanksgiving. You can choose to do special shopping days or a planned food drive. We are happy to provide shopping lists, boxes, and arrange pick-ups. It is a great opportunity for you to give back in a big way! Last year's efforts helped to feed over 1,800 families. If you are interested in participating, please reach out to Leslie Bunge, HSHM's Director of Development at lbunge@hshministries.org or 309-319-2820. Thank you!



Current Needs

Because of you, Home Sweet Home can provide strength and renewal to families seeking refuge. We kindly ask for your help in collecting the following items:

- Bottled Water
- Hand Towels
- Wash Rags
- Disposable Water Cups
- Ziploc Snack Size Bags
- Toilet Paper/Paper Towels
- Sanitize Wipes
- New 3-4 Person Tents

Donations can be dropped off at the Bread For Life Co-op at 301 East Oakland Avenue in Bloomington anytime Monday through Friday from 9 am to 4 pm. Be sure to check out hshministries.org and click on the "Ways to Give" tab for our updated needs and Amazon Wish Lists. Thank you so much!

Invitation to Prayer

As Home Sweet Home cares for our neighbors this summer, we appreciate your help in praying for:

- all those involved in helping to build The Bridge.
- the Bread For Life Co-op and its members.
- individuals, families, and Veterans seeking a fresh start.
- our staff and community partners involved with The Junction.
- community gardeners that provide HSHM with fresh produce.
- the well-being of volunteers, clients, and staff who devote their time to our shelter.

Your loving thoughts and prayers are truly appreciated. God Bless!