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An Insider's Look at COTS

Written by a resident in COTS' Living Debt Free Program

Before coming to COTS, I had just spent a year in prison for an OWI. Upon release, I had no place to go so I was put in transitional living quarters that the Probation and Parole Department provide. I had nothing. No clothes, no furniture. It was very rough for a couple of weeks.

I heard about the COTS Men's Program from one of the paroles where I was living. I called and checked into COTS and felt that this was a place that I could benefit from. COTS offered food, a bed and some structure that I felt I needed in my life. They offered living skills, like Financial Peace University and RentSmart. They also encouraged healthy activities for living sober, like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

I have been at COTS for 2 1/2 years. In those 2 1/2 years, COTS has supported me through the deaths of friends. They have provided me transportation to and from work when my car had broken down. They have worked with me when my expenses, like car repairs, took all of my money. They have provided me with clothing vouchers and Christmas presents at a time in my life when I felt like no one cared.

Since coming to COTS, I have gone back to school to accomplish something I have never had in my life. I was a high school dropout. If everything goes well, this spring of 2015 I will earn my two-year diploma for Industrial Metal Fabrication and Welding.

COTS provided me with a tutor from Lawrence University who helped me achieve a B in math for the trades.

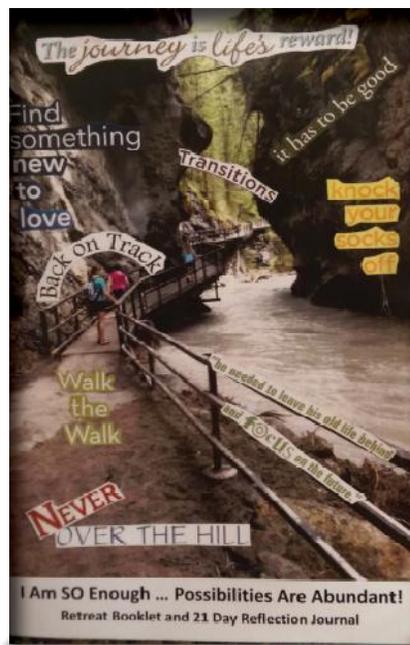
I have been on the Dean's List for two years.



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"I Am SO Enough"

First annual Women's Empowerment Retreat helps residents reclaim their power



Soft guitar music played as the women entered the banquet room. As they gazed around the beautifully decorated room, they were immediately welcomed by four life coaches. Thus marked the beginning of the first annual COTS Women's Empowerment Retreat, "I am SO Enough...Possibilities Are Abundant." The retreat was held over two Saturdays in July at Atlas Coffee Mill, which generously donated their lovely space.

The retreat was made possible by a generous anonymous donation from an individual who wanted to do something special for the residents of COTS' Women's Program. "When I was told of the donation and its goal, I knew I wanted to do something that would help strengthen the women and have a long-lasting impact to enrich their lives," explains Dawn Butler, Women's Case Manager. "I've worked with women for years and have been a first hand witness at the oppression, struggles, low self-esteem, lack of affordable mental health services, addiction, domestic and sexual abuse, and trauma many women face--often daily. It seemed natural to hold an event that drew them together as strong, independent women and to focus on the possibilities and what they CAN achieve."

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In the last six months, I have been moved out of the COTS Men's Program and into the Living Debt Free Program here at COTS. This program helps me keep a budget that focuses on getting all of my debt paid off while keeping my current expenses up to date. I am also a mentor here at COTS for the younger men. I try to show them responsible behavior by doing my chores and helping out where needed. I'm also a listening ear when they need one.

What I have learned here at COTS is financial responsibility, as well as dealing with life on life's terms. I have learned that there are people out there, when you are at the lowest point in your life and have nothing, that do care and want to see you succeed.

COTS has showed me kindness and love when I felt like I was going to be another statistic. **I know that my choices are my own, and no one can change them but me. But I am certain that COTS is a big reason that I am a better person at this point in my life.**

My plans for the future are to finish college, get my own apartment and give back to the community.

For other resident testimonials, check out our  page @ <http://www.YouTube.com/COTSAppleton>

Snapshots of Success - Noteworthy Facebook Posts

- **July 15, 2014** - A big thank you to the Festival Foods Northland managers who volunteered at COTS today! The group worked with our young adult residents to paint our lobby a soothing sage.
- **August 2, 2014** - Congratulations to one of our residents who recently bought a car with cash after he was inspired by what he learned in Dave Ramsay's Financial Peace University!
- **August 11, 2014** - Congratulations to one of our residents who recently celebrated one year of sobriety!
- **September 10, 2014** - Congratulations are in order for one of our single mothers who just moved out of COTS with her son and into her own home!
- **September 12, 2014** - Earlier this week, our residents had loads of fun working with our friends from Riverview Gardens to make pizza with ingredients from our hoop house harvest!



One of our super creative residents designed this shirt!

"Like" us on  Facebook @ [facebook.com/COTSInc](https://www.facebook.com/COTSInc)

Learning Matters

While unemployment is one of the main causes of homelessness, many of our residents are stuck in low-paying jobs due to their lack of education. In response to this issue, we launched a new education-focused initiative this year called Learning Matters.

The goal of Learning Matters is to remove the barriers that are preventing our participants from obtaining the level of education needed to achieve financial stability. To help achieve this goal, we collaborate with the Fox Valley Literacy Council, CAP Services and Fox Valley Technical College. As part of the Learning Matters initiative, we launched a G.E.D. pilot program this summer.

Learning Matters contributes to the success of our residents, especially those in our Young Adult Program. Through Learning Matters, young adults at COTS are given the opportunity to think and dream about their future; for the first time in their lives, furthering their education becomes a possibility.

The statistics to the left represent the 8 young adults currently participating in COTS programming.



Creating vision

The retreat was led by four area life coaches: Cassie Schuh (Zaptastic Professional Coaching), Lynn McLaughlin (DandAlliance, LLC), Sarah Crawford (Siwati Life Coaching LLC), and Jeanne Loehnis (Songs for Your Spirit, LLC). This was the first time that the four women had the opportunity to work together. As expressed by Cassie Schuh, "Planning the COTS Women's Empowerment Retreat with the other area Life Coaches was a great experience! Having different backgrounds and a variety of coaching experiences and tools allowed us to incorporate different perspectives into the retreat experience for the COTS women."

Current and past residents of COTS Women's Program were invited to attend. During the retreat, they discussed topics such as creating vision, empowerment, identifying personal strengths, and building trust in self and others. In total, 21 current and former residents attended the retreat.

"We all have our own story to tell"

After attending the first session, one COTS resident said her goal was to "take [her] power back." Erin, who also attended the retreat, says that the experience was life-changing. "I never really knew how to stand up for myself as a woman...Yeah, we all have our own story to tell. But **I learned how to understand women better, and I learned how to understand myself better as a woman.**"

For Erin, part of the joy of the retreat was simply being able to share stories with other women. She was particularly inspired by another attendee who is also a single mom. In fact, Erin's experience echoes that of many other attendees, who all noted that they felt comforted by the commonalities between all of their experiences--and the level of trust that the women felt with each other as they shared their stories. "It was so beautiful because I knew I was meant to be there," Erin grins.

Dawn enjoyed watching the retreat come to fruition: "It was emotional, heartwarming, strengthening, beautiful, and so much more than I had originally imagined."

The retreat was only made possible by the generosity of numerous donors, including Atlas Coffee Mill & Cafe, Fox Banquets & Rivertype Catering, Woodman's, Insta Print Plus, Inc., DandAlliance LLC, The Mooring Programs, Inc., Songs For Your Spirit Life Coaching, StoweGood, and a generous anonymous donor.

Donation Highlights: July - September 2014

In-Kind

We have been absolutely overwhelmed with generous in-kind donations so far this year! Here are a few highlights:

- Sandwiches, veggies, potato salad and sweet breads - Bethany Lutheran Church
- 2 fruit trays for our Women's Empowerment Retreat - Fox Banquets & Rivertype Catering Inc.
- Ten 10-ride Valley Transit bus passes and Glad containers
- 15 comfort rucks filled with everyday living essentials for veterans - Dryhootch Fox Valley (Paul and Tom are pictured from left to right)
- Handmade quilts - Zion Lutheran Church
- 2 couches and 12 chairs for our residents - Touchmark on West Prospect
- Numerous wish list items - Principal Financial Group



Thank you to everyone who supports COTS and our mission of "Ending Homelessness in the Fox Valley." Together, we are making a difference!

Chili Cook-Off Commemorates Meal Ministry



Pictured: Former Men's Meal Ministry Coordinator, Jean O'Brien (left) and current Women's Meal Ministry Coordinator, Lynn Van Zeeland (right).

On the evening of August 19th, residents and Meal Ministers alike gathered in the community room of the men's facility at COTS. The occasion: a special chili cook-off to celebrate our wonderful Meal Ministers, who voluntarily drop off hot meals for residents three nights per week. This was an opportunity for residents to return the favor, as residents from each of COTS' programs teamed up in an effort to create the best chili.

All attendees placed a vote on one of the following chilies: traditional, chicken, turkey and vegetarian. And the lucky winner was the vegetarian option, created by our Men's Program!

During the dinner, COTS also presented the recently retired Men's Meal Ministry Coordinator, Jean O'Brien, with a COTS poster (pictured on the left) created by an artistic young adult in our program. Residents were given an opportunity to write personalized thank you notes on the poster to commemorate Jean's fifteen years as a dedicated volunteer.

All in all, the evening was a success. Our Meal Ministers went home with full bellies, after being showered with appreciation by the residents of COTS.



P.O. Box 1645
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Endowment

Match Challenge

Through our 2014 Endowment Match Challenge, **The Doug and Carla Salmon Foundation will match any gifts given towards the COTS' Endowment Fund, up to \$5,000.**

In other words, **your donation will be doubled!**

A contribution to our endowment allows you to leave a long-term legacy by investing in our community.

Please send gifts to COTS, Inc., P.O. Box 1645, Appleton, WI 54912.

Memo line: Endowment

Winter Wish List

- \$5 Walmart Gift Cards
- Christmas Ornaments
- NEW Christmas Lights
- Small Pocket Calendars for 2015
- Chapstick
- Ice Scrapers for Vehicles
- Men's and Women's Socks
- Large Christmas Gift Bags
- Hand/Foot Warmers
- Men's Slippers (Sizes L - XXL)
- Women's Slippers (Sizes M - L)

The "Season of Giving" is upon us. Please do your part to make this holiday season an enjoyable one for the residents of COTS.



Earn Money for COTS

Shop at any of 160 select area businesses, including Festival Foods, Papa Murphy's, Pizza Hut, Applebee's, Panda Express and WG&R, to earn money for COTS. These **businesses offer cash back to COTS whenever you make a purchase with your credit or debit card.**

To register your card, visit www.ucmission.com