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Amanda: Success in Bloom

"I separated from my parents and family because of abuse, and they did not want me anymore."

To the outside world, it looked like Amanda's life was on track. She was at Lawrence University studying music education when her family's abuse reached a new level and they cut her off financially. Without their financial support, Amanda could no longer afford to stay in school, and she had nowhere else to go. She had just turned 19. "In the past, I've lived in shelters, on the street, and on various couches of people I know," she remembers.

Then Amanda learned about COTS, and she moved into the Women's Program in February. This driven young woman has quickly turned her life around and glows as she talks about all of her accomplishments. **"Since coming to COTS, I've gained stability in my life.** I have been able to begin therapy and get back on medications I wasn't able to afford before," she explains.

Work-n-Wheels

Amanda was able to find a rewarding full-time position working with individuals with disabilities. She also recently was able to purchase her very first vehicle thanks to support from the Work-n-Wheels program through CAP Services. The Work-n-Wheels program provides interest-free loans to low-income individuals so that they can purchase their own vehicles.



She is also working to start a community garden at the women's building. The garden will focus on growing fresh vegetables for the residents of the program. "I want to teach my peers that they can provide for themselves," she explains. She believes that gardening will be "a good therapeutic outlet for the women here."

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Collaboration Generates Hope for Homeless Veterans

For the past few years, COTS has sought to initiate programming for area veterans in need. Towards the end of 2014, COTS began collaborating with the Fox Valley Veterans Council in order to provide a safe and stable place for veterans as they wait to receive a government housing voucher and search for independent housing. In order to qualify for a voucher, veterans need to have a physical mailing address for a short period of time. COTS is able to provide this necessary component, while simultaneously providing the space and attention that a veteran experiencing homelessness needs.



Six veterans are currently receiving services through this collaboration. As the only provider of transitional shelter in the area, COTS is the most viable option when taking into consideration the health needs of our vets. At COTS, we provide individuals with the tools needed in order to achieve self-sufficiency. Other housing providers in the Fox Valley serve emergency and crisis needs.

Each veteran that is referred to COTS through the Fox Valley Veterans Council is expected to participate in all aspects of COTS programming, including paying a monthly program fee to cover the cost of case


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Back to school

Amanda is perhaps the most excited about recently gaining independent student status. This will allow her to receive more financial aid, since prior to this, her school financial package was based on her parents' income. Now, she can afford to return to Lawrence University. She plans to continue studying music education this fall.

Amanda's experience has given her insight that will benefit her as she works to "pay it forward" in the future through her work in education.

"I've learned that there are many people just like me who've gone through just as much or more and they can still turn it around."

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

Noteworthy Facebook Posts

Snapshots of Success



Thanks to the amazing support of our community, our residents were paid a visit by the Easter bunny!

COTS' dart tournament was "a great way [for residents] to build community continuity." - COTS Resident



In honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, students from Lawrence University spent the afternoon volunteering at COTS.



The Girl Scouts prepared a delicious feast of lasagna and salad for the residents in our Women's Program.

Aquire Restoration generously donated beds for our residents, providing them with a comfortable place to sleep.

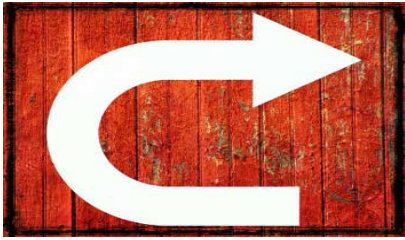


management and basic needs. The council will fund up to three months of program fees for each veteran that moves into the COTS program.

A closer look at the life of a vet experiencing homelessness

As an active member of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Josh was the first veteran referred to the COTS program through the Fox Valley Veterans Council. Josh served in the army for about six years and now suffers from physical limitations that forced him to let go of his job as a mechanic. But this was only the beginning of a tumultuous series of events.

While struggling with his medical condition and unemployment, Josh was also undergoing marital issues, which would later lead to a divorce. He now has designated visitations with his daughter and attends child support court. After the separation, he experienced financial hardship, making it difficult to rent on his own. As a result, he spent time couch surfing from one place to the next. Eventually, he decided to seek help from the Fox Valley Veterans Council, which resulted in a referral to COTS. This was a turning point for Josh.



Turning life “180 degrees around”

On December 6, 2014, Josh moved into COTS, where he has been given time to reflect and learn more about himself. When asked what he has taken away from his time at COTS so far, he hopefully replied, **“There’s more help out there than I thought there was...I honestly didn’t know there was a program like this.”** He has also learned valuable lessons about budgeting through Financial Peace University, which is offered to all COTS residents.

After only a month and a half at COTS, Josh received a government-issued housing voucher. He is now taking the necessary steps towards self-sufficiency, such as securing a job at Josef’s Gyros & Kabobs. He is also looking forward to the possibility of going back to school to get a degree in a new field. After everything he has been through, Josh now realizes that **“Even when your life is in the dumps, you can still turn it 180 degrees around.”**

This story undoubtedly sheds light on the importance of the collaboration between COTS and the Fox Valley Veterans Council. There is a newfound hope for veterans in our community: Josh may represent one of many who will succeed in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Volunteer Spotlight: Sarah O’Hearn

Sarah O’Hearn first learned about COTS’ Meal Ministry Program when she was looking for Thanksgiving volunteer opportunities for her and her husband. She found the opportunity on our website and knew she had found her calling. “I love it!” she exclaims. “For me, it’s perfect because I love cooking, and I get to help others.”

Meal Ministers take turns providing a meal for COTS residents each Monday, Wednesday and Friday. They prepare delicious meals, either as a group or individually, and then drop the food off at COTS. Our Meal Ministers not only provide COTS residents with a scrumptious, home-cooked meal, they also show our residents that our community cares about their well-being.

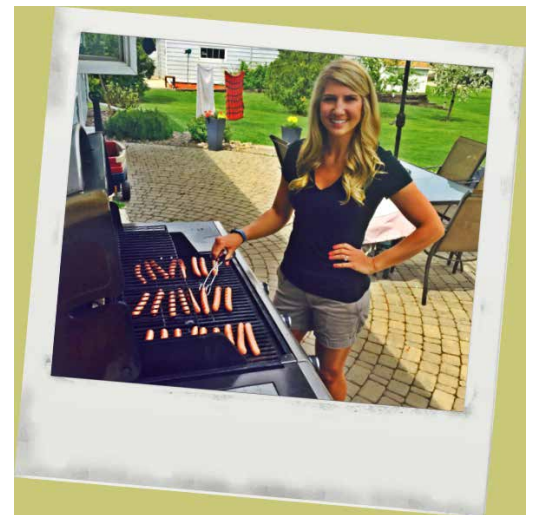
Sarah is a native of Fond du Lac and is in the process of building a home in Neenah. She serves as an IT Business Analyst at Humana. Humana recently began providing its employees with eight hours of “VTO”-volunteer time off. This allows Sarah to take some time off work on the days she cooks for the residents. It also allows her time for her other volunteer roles, including volunteering with the Neenah Soccer Club.

“So thankful”

This past Thanksgiving, it took Sarah and her husband all day to prepare the Thanksgiving feast for the residents. They prepared everything from scratch--even the mashed potatoes. Her coworkers pitched in as well, providing 10 desserts to accompany the meal. “The residents were so friendly, so thankful,” she recalls

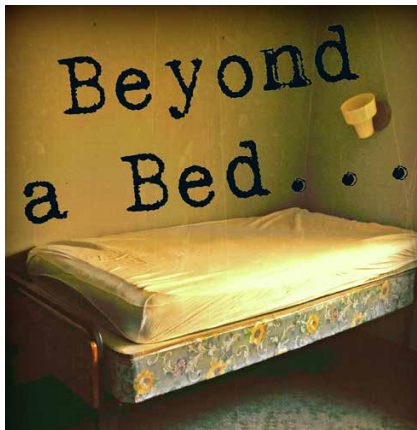
Sarah just prepared her second, cook-out themed meal for COTS residents, which consisted of hamburgers, brats, potato chips, baked beans and rice crispy bars.

Volunteering has always been important to Sarah. “I think because growing up I was very blessed--we were never hungry. **It’s so important to give back because there are people in need in our own backyard,**” she explains.





P.O. Box 1645
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Please join us for our annual Fall fundraising event.

Date: *October 15, 2015*

Location: *Riverview Gardens, Appleton, WI*

More details to come on our website.

www.appletoncots.org

Interested in learning more about COTS?

Open house

Consider attending a COTS open house. Please contact Lindsey MacDonald at 920-268-0603 ext. 704 or lmacdonald@appletoncots.org for more info.



COTS was one of 45 organizations that participated in this year's Volunteer Center Human Race. Thanks to the amazing support of our community, we raised a grand total of \$1,556! All donations will help us to realize our mission of "Ending Homelessness in the Fox Valley."



HUMAN RACE

