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Melanie: "Now I've Overcome"

"If anyone ever had a predisposition for alcoholism, it's me." Melanie is a bubbly, 30-something brunette with a big smile. She started going to bars with her family at the age of 14. The way her family bonded was through drinking, she explains.

Melanie got married at the age of 19. She stayed sober during her pregnancies, but would quickly fall back into her old drinking habits after giving birth. Her husband also drank heavily, which made it even harder for her to maintain sobriety.

After a while, Melanie realized that her relationship with her spouse was unhealthy. They divorced in 2012 and engaged in a long custody battle. She signed an absolute sobriety clause in order to keep custody of her children, but couldn't even last a month. "I knew I had to get help," she remembers.

"I worked for it."

Melanie decided to risk losing custody of her children by checking into treatment. She stayed in treatment for 4 1/2 months, and, while there, found employment at STEP Industries. STEP Industries provides employment, along with support and guidance, to people in recovery.

After leaving her treatment program, Melanie had nowhere to go. She knew that she could move in with her mother, but since her mother drank, Melanie knew that it would be an unhealthy environment for her. So she turned to COTS.

While at COTS, Melanie learned life skills she needed to succeed in her new, independent life. "Before, I never had anything to worry about. I was married at 19, divorced at 33," she explains. She continued working at STEP Industries and learned how to budget on a small income. "It made me feel so much better because I worked for it," Melanie recalls.

Unfortunately, after just a few months at COTS, Melanie needed emergency surgery. The surgery required a long recovery period, so Melanie decided to move in with her mother. Fortunately, Melanie's mother decided to support Melanie's sobriety by not drinking herself.



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COTS' Meal Ministry Program Turns Over New Leaf



Pictured: Lynn Van Zeeland (left) and Jean O'Brien (right)

The early days

Don Stoegbauer started COTS' Meal Ministry Program not long after COTS was first established as a nonprofit organization in 1998. Our Meal Ministry team is an "army" of hundreds of volunteers who deliver hot meals to more than 60 residents experiencing homelessness every Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening. This extraordinary effort provides the basic need of nourishment to the residents of COTS.

About fifteen years ago, Don reached out to Meal Ministry volunteers, hoping to find individuals who were willing to step up to the task of coordinating the Meal Ministry Program. Lynn Van Zeeland and Jean O'Brien were the only individuals to respond to Don's request. Lynn and Jean then became known as Don's "call girls," since the Meal Ministry Program became dependent on them calling volunteers who were willing to prepare meals.

Don was a real inspiration to both Jean and Lynn. In Jean's words, "Don could find a meal any place in the Valley." He would take it upon himself to visit area churches and talk with congregations whenever a need arose for more Meal Ministers.

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"A new beginning"


Fast forward over a year, and Melanie is doing great. She remains involved with COTS through our Aftercare Program, which supports former COTS residents for two years after they move out. Melanie has been sober for two years and is working full-time as a massage therapist. Her smile grows wide as she talks about her job. "I love pampering people!"

She also saved up enough money to live in her own apartment, seeing it as "a new beginning" despite its humble appearance. Melanie continues to fight for custody of her children, but continues to see them on weekends.

She has learned countless life lessons from her experience. "I wanted to give up so many times, but I didn't," she explains. Her advice:

"You can't do anything positive with your life if you don't have self-worth. Find something that you keep fighting for. For me, that's my faith, myself, and my children."

Finally: "Never give up."

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

Snapshots of Success: Noteworthy Facebook Posts

- **March 6, 2014** - Something to celebrate: One of the residents in our Living Debt Free Program moved out of COTS and into his own apartment. While at COTS, he paid down \$20,000 in debt!
- **April 25, 2014** - She's on the road to success: One of the mothers in our program just bought her own car with cash after using the skills she learned in Financial Peace University to save up her money! Way to go!
- **May 1, 2014** - Even more great news: One of our residents just earned his chip for 25 years of sobriety!
- **May 19, 2014** - A huge congratulations to one of our residents: He just graduated with his certification as a Transport Trailer Service Technician!



25-year sobriety chip earned by a COTS resident

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



Pictured: Case Manager, Jenna Hammer, with the young adult success wall

Blog: Celebrate Successes, Not Failures

By Jenna Hammer, COTS Young Adult and Living Debt Free Case Manager

The COTS Young Adult Program started in 2012 to fulfill a need in the community due to young adults aging out of the foster care and juvenile systems with nowhere to go. COTS' Young Adult Program allows residents between the ages of 18 and 24 to complete the necessary living skills instruction to be able to live independently.

Many of the young adults we serve come from the juvenile justice system, so they understand and expect punishment and negative consequences for their negative actions. At COTS, we are turning that thinking of highlighting the negatives around. **By emphasizing and celebrating the positives in the young adults' lives, we make them recognize that the world isn't all about focusing on the bad in someone, but instead reflecting on the good in someone.**

As the Young Adult Case Manager, I have experimented with many different negative and positive reinforcement techniques since I started in May of 2013 to help my clients succeed, and I think I've finally found what works! Instead of giving the residents a consequence for not doing their chores, not participating and not having a clean room, why not applaud them for doing their chore, putting effort into the program and having a clean room?

In this journey of exploring all the different options for reinforcing the rules, I am happy to be where I am now with the COTS Young Adult Program. The guys are very excited when their reward points increase weekly; they are even more excited when they get to cash those points in for prizes, including small amount gift cards to area businesses.

In the end, setting our residents up to succeed instead of setting them up for failure reflects our mission of *Ending Homelessness in the Fox Valley*. **If we can change lives around from the punitive stand point to the rewarding stand point, we can surely make a difference!**

To read full story or other COTS blogs, visit <http://appletoncots.org/news/>

“COTS has come a long, long way”

According to Lynn, “COTS has come a long, long way” since Don was involved with Meal Ministry, and “Don would be very proud.” In fact, during Don’s time with Meal Ministry, Meal Ministers were warned not to go in alone when dropping off food at COTS. Jean and Lynn both recall that residents wouldn’t even make eye contact with anyone who was bringing in a meal.

Today’s Meal Ministers have a much more positive experience. COTS’ residents greet Meal Ministers with a friendly smile and even help them to unload their cars.

After fifteen years of service, Jean, the Men’s Meal Ministry Coordinator, is set to retire from Meal Ministry at the end of June. One of her fondest memories during her time as a volunteer is having Meal Ministers call her to tell her how well their food was received by COTS’ residents. She remembers one Meal Minister saying “One guy cleaned out my pan...I was willing to take it home dirty.”

Jean will certainly be missed, but as with any other program at COTS, change is inevitable. Jen Gaerthofner, one of COTS’ many dedicated Meal Ministers, has graciously agreed to serve as Jean’s replacement. **We are so grateful for all of the wonderful Meal Ministers who stand with us in the fight against homelessness. Each and every volunteer is truly a valuable member of the COTS team.**

If interested in becoming a member of our Meal Ministry team, contact COTS Development Office at 920-268-0603 ext. 704 or info@appletoncots.org

In-Kind Donation Highlights: January - June 2014

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

- **864** jars of peanut butter and jelly - Phoenix Weber (6 years old), with the assistance of Appleton area schools
- 3 desks for resident rooms - Maiman Chiropractic
- Wish list items - St. Nicholas Parish Congregation, Maplewood Middle School Student Council, St. Bernadette Elementary School Students, Globe University
- Handmade quilts - Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, St. Paul Congregation
- Giant meal for residents - Holy Spirit School Students
- Transportation during Help for the Homeless hygiene drive - Joe Wisnet of Christensen & Wisnet

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



Pictured: COTS' Executive Director, Andrew Wilson (left) with Phoenix Weber (right)

Cooking with Andrew

Residents learn to be “resourceful with food”

Once a month, COTS’ Executive Director, Andrew Wilson, offers a class to residents at the men’s campus, naturally titled Cooking with Andrew. Andrew works one-on-one with three to five residents during each class, teaching them how to prepare a meal using only the ingredients available in the COTS pantry. By using only what is available to them, residents learn “to be resourceful with food,” remarks Andrew; “Basically, we’re multiplying what we have.”



Jay, a resident of the Men’s Program, prepares a tasty chicken pot pie

Andrew enjoys having the opportunity to spend quality time with residents, while simultaneously teaching them a basic living skill. He especially likes witnessing each resident’s individual way of cooking. Once the food is prepared by residents participating in the class, the meal is then shared with all residents on the men’s campus.

Positive results

Although this class was only initiated in April of this year, Andrew has already seen positive results. In fact, after the first cooking session was held, one resident said he was going to utilize one of the recipes when cooking for his grandchildren. Jay, a resident of the Men’s Program, also attended the first session and felt that “it was interesting learning how to make [chicken pot pie].” He had previously never made a pot pie, other than a pre-made one from the frozen food section. The hardest part, according to Jay, was making the dough, as it was made from scratch. Jay happily reports that “[the chicken pot pies] turned out good, and it was amazing how simple it was.”

“More options and fun” to come

During the summer, there will be more resources for cooking, as COTS’ greenhouse will supply fresh vegetables grown by residents. Andrew looks forward to having “more options and fun” when cooking a meal.



P.O. Box 1645
Appleton, WI 54915

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

BEYOND A BED

Please join us for our first-ever Fall fundraising event.

Date: Thursday, October 23, 2014

Location: Riverview Gardens,
Appleton, WI

More details to come on our website

www.appletoncots.org



COTS Wish List

- Small amount gift cards for Appleton area businesses (Walmart, Express Gas Stations, Walgreens, etc.)
- Valley Transit Bus Passes (10-ride/monthly)
- Coffee (ground); Creamer (powdered)
- Olive Oil; Butter
- Dish Cloths; Dishwasher Detergent
- Tupperware with Lids (Gladware)
- Copy Paper (white/8.5x11)
- NEW Pillows; NEW Twin-Size Sheet Sets

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