

The Best Time of Year



“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” Isaiah 40:31

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A Year To Be Grateful For

This past year has been one to be grateful for and we are taking some time to reflect.

It has been one of big changes. Lynn Ann Huizingh stepped out as Executive Director of Development after 11 years of service and Christy Smith stepped into her role as the sole Executive Director. This transition has been fairly smooth as both Lynn Ann and Christy came together to help the ministry continue to provide for our guests while both were finding their feet in their new roles.

It has been a year of blessing. SWSN has been able to open all three regions again this season due to the support that we have received. Volunteers, government officials, and staff all worked hard to be able to host shelter in the north again. River Church and Immanuel Lutheran stepped up again this season to be primary host sites in Central and South. We thank God for our volunteers and partners for the support that SWSN has received to be able to get shelter started this season. North region will be opening in mid-December, but we are still praying for a third church to join the rotation.

As we begin to look forward, we are excited to see what God has in store for the ministry. We continue to see lives being changed, not only in our guests, but in everyone who is a part of making shelter happen. We are blessed to have our community and look forward to another great year.



Get To Know SWSN

Meet Our Guests

Like many others, Denver native, Nate faces a choice: Stay on the streets or accept the services SWSN offers. He chooses the latter.

“Having the shelter has saved my life more than once and I wish it was open every night.”

48 years old, Nate has braved the bitter cold nights and survived street life for two years but says just a few weeks ago he lost a close friend.

“I tried to save my friend, John. I tried to resuscitate him and he used to come to the shelter but when I found him it was too late, he had frozen to death. It shook me up.”

Nate admits that his addiction to methamphetamine is the main reason for his struggles in his life but still dreams of being set free from the chains that bind him.

“The shelter is a place where no one judges me and accepts me for who I am. I feel like they genuinely care and if I am okay and won't freeze to death.”



Nate is well known at the River Church location for pitching in and giving back. He's the first to offer his time and help anywhere needed.

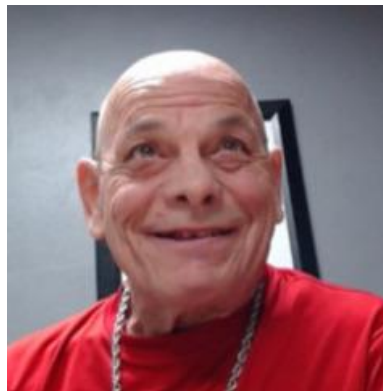
“I'm happy to be cleaning up and taking out the trash and I'm just grateful the Severe Weather Shelter is here. I hope it never goes away

because I don't know where else I would go.”

Christy Smith, Executive Director, has been working side by side with Nate, writing letters of recommendation and offering guidance in hopes of securing him a housing voucher.

“It's been a pleasure to help such a kind hearted person that's been through so much trauma in his life. Still through it all, Nate always wears a smile” Christy said.

Remembering John



John was a guest at Severe Weather Shelter Network. We remember him fondly and will miss seeing his smile.

Central Area Church Shelter – River Church

River Church is a Free Methodist church at Wadsworth and Alameda in Lakewood. Co-Pastors Howie and Nicole Snyder were ordained together in 2007, and have a long history in service to their communities. They will celebrate their 3rd year with River Church on January 1, 2024. This is their 2nd season partnering with SWSN and we are so grateful for them and their congregation!

Pastor Howie is no stranger to working with people experiencing homelessness. He was born on the mission-field in Brazil where he lived with his family until age 5. His parents intentionally moved to

urban Chicago, bringing their kingdom focused mindset of ministry with them and sheltered homeless guests in their church during his high school years. Howie went on to become a Youth Pastor in 7 churches in Oklahoma, Michigan, and Illinois over 19 years. He served as a youth minister at Downers Grove First Methodist Church from 2014-2018. His church partnered with DuPage County Pads, which houses the unhoused from October to April. They hosted a Tuesday Night Shelter once a month on rotation with other churches and provided showers and laundry for their guests. He and his youth kids set up for about 120 men, women, and children per night.

In 2022, River Church, through Lakewood Connects, came to partner with SWSN to provide overnight shelter and meals to the homeless in the Lakewood area during freezing and severe weather conditions. Because of the generosity of churches like River Church, we are able to house up to 120 people on the coldest nights of the year.



In addition to partnering with SWSN, River Church contributes to the community in many other ways. It operates Shepherd's Pantry, a food bank that provides food boxes and breakfast to about 100 families a month. Creative Recovery – an art-based, holistic, 12-step recovery group meets there Wednesdays at 6pm. The church is home to a Community Center and a Community Garden, and they are starting a partnership with Youth For Christ. Nicole Snyder, the other half of this team, is a Licensed

Professional Counselor, and runs River Community Counseling Center, on-site. Their membership is enthusiastically engaged in their many ministries.

River Church shares it's space with The Way Congregation, which incorporates biblical aspects of Messianic Judaism with the gentile church, as well as NAS Recovery Solutions, which provides coaching, peer support, and help to clients who are leaving incarceration and struggling with addiction. Transcendence Recovery also shares space and offers support, treatment, and resources for sustainable recovery from addiction.

If you are looking for a new church that is actively involved in real service, this is the one. You can reach them at riverchurchmovement.org or 303-233-3430



Meet Our Central Shelter Manager

33 year old Carissa is in her 2nd year with SWSN and she loves it! Having lived through many years of homelessness, she says the best part of what she does is the people.

“Generally, people don’t understand the mindset of being homeless, the freedom that having no financial obligations offers.”

Having operated from that mindset for years, she is able to relate to that viewpoint. We tend to think that providing housing to displaced people is the solution, but not everyone on the street is ready for that. Whether they are or aren’t, Carissa meets people where they are and offers support, friendship, and guidance in whatever ways she can. Developing relationships and having access to resources to offer assistance is her favorite part.

Carissa’s 2nd job is with Movement 5280, a local non-profit organization that supports and gives resources to homeless youth who have aged out of foster care and other at-risk young people. She sought help there over 13 years ago as a client, stayed involved, and has been working there as a Core Member of their staff for over 5 years. She is a Personal Navigator and will be training as a Peer Counselor in February. She helps young people with things like ordering Birth Certificates and Social Security Cards, IDs, and options for housing. She says that work is incredibly rewarding.

Carissa was born in Oregon and grew up in Washington and Colorado. She says she was a very angry teenager, and diabetic, which led to multiple hospitalizations in her younger years. At 17, her grandparents, at their wits end, called the authorities on her mom, which led to her being placed in foster care 2 weeks before her 18th birthday. She caused enough chaos in the home that they placed her in a residential treatment center at Urban Peak at 19. When she turned 21 and aged out of the program, she was homeless on the streets of Denver.

She bounced around, staying with family and friends as long as they’d let her, back and forth between Colorado and Washington. When she found out she was pregnant, she came back to Colorado to her mom’s, where she stayed for a month until they moved. She says

now that pregnancy saved her life. Now she had someone else’s wellbeing to consider, and her lifestyle and old thinking was not going to work for her baby.

She got in touch with a Catholic Charities home for moms and stayed there throughout her pregnancy, then gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. With their assistance, she was able to find an apartment, a job, and a baby sitter.



When her son was 3.5 months old, her babysitter called out for the day due to her own child’s illness and Carissa had to find someone to watch him in a pinch. She reached out to another mom that she’d known at Catholic Charities, who agreed to take care of her son while she was working. When she walked in the door from work, she heard a blood-curdling scream coming from her baby’s room. When she picked him up, his body was limp. They rushed him to the hospital and he stopped breathing three times on the way. After examining him, the doctors found nothing physically wrong, so she took him home. In a later incident, her roommate called her at work after the babysitter left and told her, “Your son is BLUE.” She called an ambulance and ran out of work without saying anything to anyone. He was rushed to Children’s Hospital where doctors examined him and reported back to her that her son had multiple traumatic brain injuries consistent

Get Involved with SWSN

Severe Weather Shelter Network has many ways to get involved and we are inviting you to find the way that you are being called to serve.

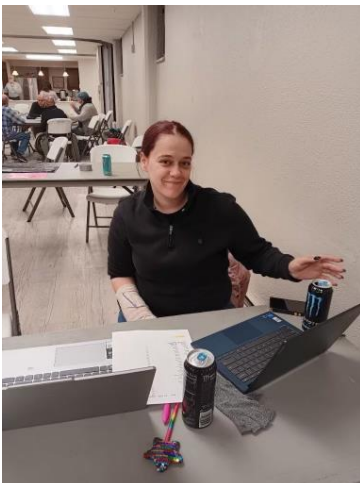
with Shaken Baby Syndrome. They said he would most likely not survive his injuries, and if he did, would not have a high quality of life. They induced a coma and kept him in the hospital for one month before placing him in foster care.

Carissa went back to Catholic Charities to an independent home. Over the next 18 months, feeling helpless and hopeless, she worked through all the requirements to get her son back. She said it was a really dark time and she almost gave up, but she's so grateful she didn't.

Her son is now 7 years old. He has been in therapy his entire life, but he's made an astounding recovery from his injuries. They're in a stable, solid place now. When Carissa talks about her boy, you can hear the pride, love, wonder, and gratitude in her voice. "He wasn't supposed to be here, but he defied the odds – he is truly my Miracle Child!" Carissa takes her son to work with her at both jobs.

"I think it's important that he knows where we came from, and how important it is to help others. He's the best kid in the world."

Thank you Carissa for your service, and for your inspiring story of hope.



Volunteer

Volunteers are the backbone of SWSN and we wouldn't be able to provide shelter without you. Signing up to volunteer is easy! Visit our website and fill out the registration form on the volunteers page or by scanning the QR Code.



Once you have registered, you can sign up for slots on SignUp genius using the following steps:

1. Follow the link provided for the week in our emails/texts to SignUp genius
2. Find the date and volunteer slot that you are looking to fill
3. If the date or volunteer position is not listed, it has already been filled. Shelter Managers keep it up to date.
4. Enter your contact information and click the "sign up now" button

If you run into any problems or have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to your Shelter Manager!

Shelter Manager Information

- North – Tara;**
 NorthRC@swshelternetwork.com
 720-389-4830
- Central – Carissa;**
 CentraRC@swshelternetwork.com
 720-389-4875
- South – Jessica;**
 SouthRC@swshelternetwork.com
 720-398-3972

Supply Drives

Supplies are urgently needed for shelter and our guests. Supply drives or donating items are a great way to support SWSN. You can host a supply drive with your church or by yourself! You can also share about our needs on social media, your work place, and Nextdoor. We are looking for:

- Large bath towels
- Duct tape and masking tape
- Caution tape
- Winter hats
- Ski gloves
- Sweatpants
- Coffee
- Sugar
- Creamer
- Tea bags
- Sleeping bags
- Mylar emergency blankets
- Tarps
- Amazon Gift cards for boots
- Heavy wool blankets
- Men's & Women's underwear
- Travel toothpaste, mouthwash, floss, & deodorant
- Chapstick
- Ear plugs
- Disposable plates & bowls
- Cleaning wipes
- Large black yard trash bags



Once items are collected and ready for donation, please contact your Shelter Manager to arrange drop off/pick up of items. **Please do not drop items off at host site locations without Shelter Managers being present.**

Food donations need to be dropped off between 5pm – 6pm ready to serve.

Registration

Assisting a potential guest to help them get registered for SWSN has never been easier! Potential guests who are interested in registering for shelter will need to call our guest hotline at 720-389-4041 on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10am – 12pm or beginning at 9am on shelter days.

Shelter Managers will take care of all aspects of registration during that time and the potential guest will know whether they qualify for shelter, where to go, and all pertinent information by the end of the phone call.

Bus Tickets

Bus tickets are available to all registered guests who have reserved a space on a shelter night. The locations and times of pick up are:

North –

Mission Arvada

7500 75th Ave
Arvada, CO 80002
Pick up during business hours M – Sat; Sundays ONLY from 3:00pm – 4:00pm

Central –

Mean Street Ministry

1380 Ammons St.
Lakewood, CO 80214
Pick up from: 4:00pm – 5:00pm

Or

Golden Library

1019 10th St.
Golden, CO 80401
Pick up from: 9:00am – 5:00pm

South –

Life Center Littleton

5804 S Datura St.
Littleton, CO 80120
Pick up from: 3:00pm – 4:00pm

Communication

Email communication from our database has been hit or miss and we have found out why this is happening. Due to the number of emails we send during the season, email hosts (gmail, microsoft, etc.) view us a spam after a while. To make ensure you are receiving our emails, please **add us as contacts** for the following emails:

Christy@swshelternetwork.com

connect@swshelternetwork.com

This will help your email server know that you want to receive emails from us.

If you are still not receiving emails, please reach out to Karen at:

Karen@swshelternetwork.com

Colorado Gives Day

Colorado Gives Day was on December 5th and we successfully raised **\$22,370 of our \$75,000 goal**. SWSN is grateful to all of you who donated to help us continue providing life saving shelter to those in need. Without donors like you, SWSN would not be able to open our doors for shelter.



It only takes a little to make a big impact.
 Donate to Severe Weather Shelter Network today.
Raised: \$22,370

We are so grateful to everyone who contributed! **We are still a long way from our \$75,000 goal. We need more funds to ensure that we can provide emergency shelter for the rest of this season.**

End of Year Giving

Severe Weather Shelter Network is a nonprofit and we rely on people like you to support our work. All donations made to SWSN are tax deductible and help make sure that we can continue to save the lives of those experiencing homelessness during the frigid cold Colorado winter nights.

What is your best gift you can give today to support our work through the rest of this season?

Scan the QR code to make your donation today!



Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from the team at Severe Weather Shelter Network!



We are available to answer questions!

A lot of information was shared in this newsletter. You may have questions or thoughts you would like to share with us. Perhaps you would like to give us information about the place you work or other possibilities for funding. Maybe you would like to volunteer with us in some way.

We are here to speak with you and hear what you have to say.

You can call or email Christy with your questions. We look forward to speaking with you soon.

Christy Smith
Executive Director
christy@swshelternetwork.com
720-362-7067

Financial contributions can be given online or through the postal service at:

www.swshelternetwork.com/donate

Severe Weather Shelter Network
PO Box 620546
Littleton, CO 80162



Severe Weather Shelter Network is a nonprofit organization under IRS code 501c3. All financial gifts are deductible

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