



NEWSLETTER

The Haven of Transylvania County



Glancing back – 2025: A Year of Momentum at The Haven

In 2025, The Haven continued to be a place of refuge and support for our neighbors in Transylvania County facing homelessness and housing instability.

Over the course of the 2025 year, we served more than 100 individuals, including 18 families with children, and expanded our transitional housing efforts to help people move from crisis toward stability.

But the impact of 2025 cannot be measured by numbers alone. It can be seen in the courage of a parent working to rebuild after hardship, in the relief of a child sleeping somewhere safe, and in the determination of individuals taking steps toward employment, healing, and eventually, finally, permanent housing.

This was also a year of growth for The Haven as we expanded our programs and strengthened our vision for the future, including new housing initiatives and plans for the House of Hope. Thanks to the support of our community, 2025 was a year of momentum, hope, and meaningful impact.

Looking forward – Updates on our House of Hope

As we look ahead, The Haven remains focused on what comes next: expanding shelter capacity, strengthening partnerships, moving mental health and well-being up the priority list, and creating more spaces where neighbors can access safety, support, and a path forward.

One of the most important pieces of that vision is the House of Hope, our future dedicated shelter for women seeking stability and healing. The Haven family is striving to have the House of Hope completed before the close of this year, however, to bring that vision fully to life, approximately \$200,000 remains to be raised to complete the project.

We are deeply grateful for the momentum already behind this effort and for the community of supporters helping make it possible.

Together, we are building not only a shelter, but a place of hope, dignity, new beginnings, and a lasting heartbeat of compassion for our community.



Story Spotlight–Haven Staff Pick: A Second Chance, Hearts Changed

When Warren (name changed for privacy) first came to The Haven in 2024, he arrived carrying a lifetime of challenges that could not be solved simply by providing a bed.

Before coming to The Haven, Warren had experienced homelessness, involvement with the justice system, significant trauma, and serious mental health challenges following a substance-related incident. Repeated psychiatric crises led to lengthy hospitalizations and months of recovery.

Rather than seeing Warren as a collection of diagnoses or past experiences, our staff saw someone in need of safety, stability, and compassionate support. Recovery was anything but straightforward. There were hospital stays, setbacks, and times when Warren disappeared, prompting staff to search for him late into the night. But there were also small victories.

With the support of Haven case manager Sasha Diaz, Warren was connected to an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team, providing the intensive mental health care and community support he needed. As treatment took hold, the crises became less frequent, and a different side of Warren began to emerge.

He became someone our staff could depend on. He volunteered whenever help was needed, encouraged other guests, and took great pride in caring for The Haven's flower garden. The same hands that had once struggled through crisis were now planting flowers, pulling weeds, and helping make The Haven a welcoming place for everyone.

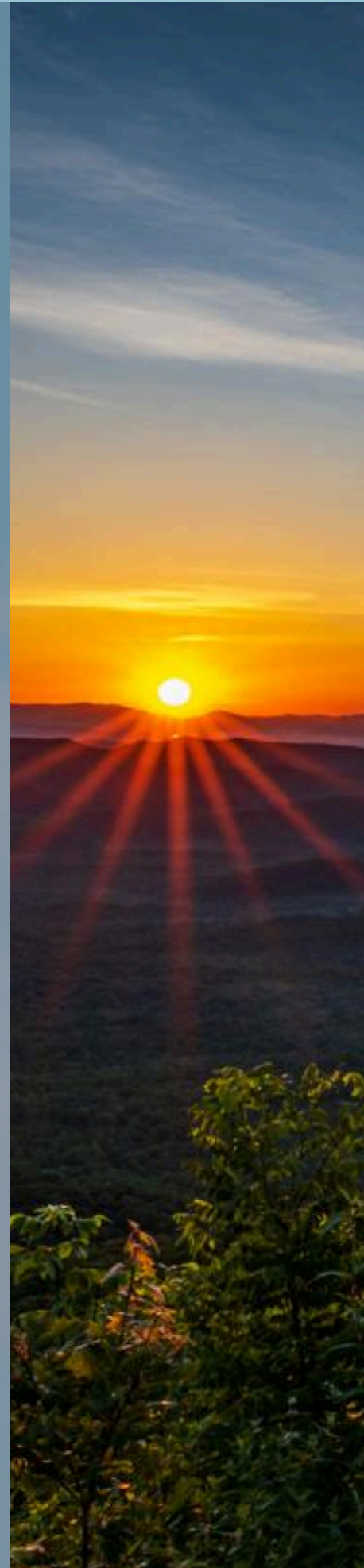
Eventually, Warren reached the top of the housing waitlist, only to have his application denied because of his past.

The Haven appealed, asking the review board to look beyond the paperwork and see the person Warren had become.

"The Warren reflected on paper is not the Warren who has been staying with us at The Haven since 2024. Warren has been following the rules, stepping up when needed, and encouraging other guests. He is someone our staff has come to trust. I respectfully ask that he be reconsidered for housing with the supports now in place."

That appeal was about more than housing. It was about recognizing that people are more than the worst day of their lives. Warren's story is still being written, and like many people living with serious mental illness, his recovery continues to have ups and downs. But today, he is living proof that change is possible when people are met with patience instead of judgment, support instead of abandonment, and opportunity instead of closed doors.

At The Haven, we believe everyone deserves to be seen for who they are today—not just who they once were. Warren reminds us why.





For the Love of Community: Growing More Than a Garden

Our organic garden is nearly in full bloom—and so is the sense of community it creates.

Each week, a dedicated volunteer, Beth Ricciardi, joins us to tend the garden alongside Haven guests. Together, they're growing tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, onions, lettuces, kale, herbs, edible flowers, and even thriving grapevines that are already producing beautiful clusters of fruit.

But the greatest harvest isn't found in the garden beds.

For many of our guests, gardening offers a chance to slow down, learn something new, and experience the satisfaction of nurturing life. Children especially delight in planting, watering, and watching their hard work grow—creating memories and building confidence along the way.

From garden to table, this shared space nourishes both body and spirit, reminding us that with a little care, patience, and community, remarkable things can grow.

Love & Respect—More than a Referral: The Power of Being Present

Some of the most meaningful support happens simply because someone is there. Through our partnership with *Love and Respect Community for Recovery and Wellness*, **Natasha**, a North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialist, now works on-site at The Haven two days each week.



Drawing on her own lived experience, Natasha is able to connect with many of our guests in a deeply authentic way, offering empathy, understanding, & hope that comes from having faced similar challenges of her own. Whether providing emotional support, connecting people with community resources around the area, or stepping in during moments of crisis, Natasha meets people exactly where they are, and does not miss a beat.

Recently, she accompanied a single mom with two boys staying in our family shelter to court and Department of Social Services appointments, advocating alongside her while helping care for her children.

Afterward, the mother told us, "We love having Natasha around – I mean, she's helping me so much."

We are grateful to Love and Respect for this partnership and the compassionate, person-centered support it brings to our community.

The Haven Team is growing—Please Join Us in Welcoming Our Newest Team Members

The Haven is delighted to welcome three remarkable individuals whose experience, compassion, and dedication strengthen our mission every day.

Laurene Sackett joins us as *Administrative Coordinator*, bringing decades of executive support experience and a heart for serving others.



Development Director **Dimah** Abdulkarim brings more than a decade of experience in communications, partnerships, and donor engagement, with a passion for connecting people to causes that strengthen our community.



Shelter Assistant **Tavia** Ricardi's own journey through homelessness after Hurricane Helene gives her a unique understanding of the challenges many of our guests face, allowing her to serve with empathy, hope, and compassion.



Together, they embody the heart of The Haven, and we couldn't be more grateful to have them on our team!



Adjoining Hearts of Community—Small Repairs. Big Milestones.

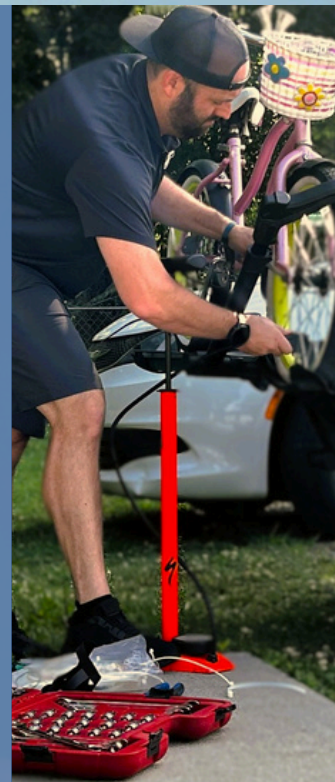
There are moments that remind us just how special this community is.

When Mariah Keogh, one of the wonderful volunteers from The Family Place, noticed that several of our children's bicycles needed repair, she connected us with Taylor Rogers, District Manager of Motion Makers Bicycle Shop at Sycamore Cycles. Taylor generously volunteered his time and expertise to get the bikes rolling again.

Not long afterward, we learned that one of those repaired bicycles helped a young guest learn to ride a bike for the very first time.

It's a beautiful reminder that kindness has a ripple effect. One volunteer noticed a need. Another community member stepped forward to help. Because they did, a child experienced one of those unforgettable milestones that builds confidence, independence, and joy.

Our heartfelt thanks to **Mariah, Taylor, The Family Place of Transylvania County, and Motion Makers Bicycle Shop at Sycamore Cycles** for showing what community looks like in action—and what "more than just a bed" truly means.



A Heartfelt thanks to our supporters— You Make Hope Possible!

Every story of hope and every step toward stability
is made possible by a caring community.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS:



FOUNDATIONS & COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Cannon Foundation
- Community Foundation of Henderson County
- Community Foundation of Sarasota County
- Lake Toxaway Charities



FAITH COMMUNITIES

- Faith Memorial Chapel
- Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
- St. Philip's Episcopal Church



PUBLIC PARTNERS

- Transylvania County Board of Commissioners



And to the many individuals and families whose faithful generosity, volunteerism, and encouragement sustain our mission throughout the year.

We would love to stay in touch!

If you've recently moved, changed your phone number or email address, or would simply like to update your contact preferences, please take a moment to scan the QR code below!



Keeping your information current helps us ensure you receive newsletters, event invitations, and updates about the impact your generosity makes throughout the year.

Thank you for helping us stay connected with you!

The Heart of The Haven

A letter from our Executive Director

Every newsletter I'd like to share a little of what I've learned after nearly 15 years serving our community. Sometimes that will be exciting news, sometimes stories of hope, and sometimes thoughts that challenge us to see homelessness through a different lens. This edition, I'd like to share something that has been on my heart...



I generally steer away from public controversy and online debates. There are several reasons for that: social media rarely leaves room for the full story, people's lives should not become public talking points, and my role in this community is to help people—not to argue about them.

It has come to a point where, I simply can't sit silently in my corner and watch all the online controversy. I feel a responsibility to offer our community some perspective—one that comes not only from my role as Executive Director of The Haven, but also from years of walking alongside individuals experiencing homelessness and from my own lived experience.

Homelessness can happen to any one of us. It is not isolated to people who struggle with substance use or mental-health concerns. Since I began working at The Haven in 2012, I have heard stories that would break your heart—and stories that would challenge every assumption people may have about who becomes homeless.

We have served people with PhDs, college degrees, published authors, skilled workers, parents, grandparents, and people who had built good lives until one crisis changed everything. I have seen people lose a loved one, fall into deep depression, lose work, face medical issues, leave unsafe relationships, or simply have nowhere left to turn.

The path to homelessness is rarely as simple as it appears. Until you have experienced the fear of not knowing where you will sleep, keep your children safe, or whether you will have a door that locks behind you at night, it is difficult to understand what homelessness does to a person. Can you imagine going to bed without a door to close and lock?

You approach it with humility, compassion, and a willingness to learn before making assumptions about circumstances you may not understand. That does not mean we should ignore the concerns about our downtown that I see online. We see them too, and we are working on them.

The Haven is a shelter, and we do not currently have our own outreach team. However, because of the increased need we are seeing, The Haven, the City, and community partners are actively working toward solutions. While I cannot share details of plans still being developed, I can share that The Haven and Love & Respect will be partnering to provide outreach to people who are unhoused in our community.

That outreach will focus on meeting people where they are and connecting them with resources: shelter, transportation, identification, benefits, counseling, mental-health treatment, detox or recovery support, medical care, and other services that can help someone begin rebuilding their life.

Later this fall, we will open the Haven House of Hope, featuring a Peer Living Room that provides outreach services and a welcoming daytime space to gather resources. After hours, it will become the living room for our 12-bed women's shelter. We are fundraising to complete the remaining renovation costs.

We know that some of the visible concerns in our community involve substance use and mental-health needs. Those needs are real—but they do not erase someone's humanity, nor do they mean that person is beyond help. People thought that I once was a lost cause and I am living proof that someone can rise up from the pile of ashes their life has become or they have made.

If you are concerned about homelessness in our community, I encourage you to learn what is already being done and consider how you can be part of the solution. There are opportunities to volunteer, support outreach, donate needed items, advocate for resources, or even go out alongside a peer support specialist to help connect people to services.

If you would like to learn more, hear the stories behind homelessness, or find out how you can help or donate to our mission, **please call me at The Haven at 877-2040.**

We can complain about the problem, or we can become part of the community that helps solve it.