

VOLUME 5 | ISSUE 2 | FALL 2023

# CONNECTIONS

THE DIFFERENCE **YOU** ARE MAKING FOR YOUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED



Volunteers of America®  
MICHIGAN

VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA MICHIGAN  
21415 CIVIC CENTER DR. SUITE 306  
SOUTHFIELD, MI 48076

**“Thank  
You!!”**

*For helping Dustin  
give back to his  
fellow veterans.*

# Veterans Serving Veterans

**How Dustin is using his personal crisis to help his fellow veterans.**

Dustin Curtis, a former Marine and member of the Army Reserves, now draws from his past experiences in his role as a Certified Peer Support Specialist for the SERV (Suicide Prevention and Referral for Veterans) program at Volunteers of America Michigan.

Dustin's military career began after a bad breakup led to a rash decision to join the military and get out of town. That quick decision paid off, **as he describes his time in the military as "one the best times of his life."** He developed a great bond with his fellow Marines on deployments to Djibouti, Africa and Afghanistan. When those deployments ended, he sought a similar comradery in the Army Reserves but felt it wasn't quite the same.

**A feeling of isolation overcame him, and he turned to alcohol to dull the pain.** In 2017, Dustin attempted suicide by an opioid overdose that nearly took his life.

**"It took six Narcan to bring me back; I woke up in the hospital not knowing what was going on... I remember being in the ambulance, not wanting to die."**

**That was a wake up call for Dustin. After his suicide attempt and near-death experience, he began a journey of improving his mental health.** Dustin says he feels he is still recovering. "It is a constant battle, but I have a lot of different coping skills now." He has found a love for running and competes in ultra marathons to keep his mind at ease. He credits his role at VOA to his continuing to improve his mental health, too.

Dustin is thankful for working at VOA because he is able to draw on all that he has been through to help other veterans going through similar struggles. Dustin feels that Peer Support Specialists, a veteran who has had suicidal thoughts or an attempt in the past is a pivotal part of the program. He says, **"They (other veterans) feel like they are talking to someone who gets what they are going through; they open up more than they may with a doctor or a case manager.**

## EMPLOYEE Spotlight



Dustin during his time as a Marine.

The SERV program is another layer of mental health support, even if you are seeing a therapist, this is an extra layer to aid in your mental health journey. We can get you in quick(ly) and help you now." He concludes by saying,

**"I want veterans to know that it does get better with time and effort."**

If you are struggling or know a veteran that is struggling the Veterans Crisis Line is available to help. **Dial 988 then PRESS 1.** For non-emergency assistance contact Volunteers of America Michigan by calling **877-509-VETS.**



# A place to call Home.

How YOU made it possible for Frank to find peace and quiet and a space of his own.

Frank never quite found his footing after separating from his wife. Falling on hard times, he moved into Oak Village Square Housing and the supportive staff helped him find a renewed sense of purpose.

Frank, 55, never imagined he would one day become homeless. He worked hard to establish a stable income, managing multiple jobs in a warehouse, and lived comfortably in a large apartment with his wife since 1988. He thought things were how they should be.

**But life at home was difficult. Over the years, his wife battled a drug addiction, and neither Frank nor his wife were faithful to each other** —a situation that grew worse with the onset of financial burdens. In 2013, he and his wife separated to go after different goals in life. With only one income, **Frank could no longer pay his rent and was evicted.**

For 10 years, Frank took refuge staying with relatives, couch surfing, and renting a small room from a friend. He felt relieved to have a warm space to lie in at night, but anxiety would follow the next morning as Frank never knew what the next day would bring. **He wanted to escape the “drug life” that surrounded him at his last residence and was waiting until he was old enough to apply for VOA’s affordable senior housing.**

With the help of his uncle, who is also a resident at Oak Village Square, Frank started navigating housing applications and learned about the United Way SE Michigan Wrap Around Support Grant from his Service Coordinator. The grant allows participants to receive housing stability and support first month’s rent. Frank was lucky enough to secure a place at Volunteers of America Michigan’s Oak Village Square Housing in Detroit and qualify for the grant.

Now in his late 60s, Frank has the security of knowing where he will sleep each night, in addition to having a strong community to support him. His uncle is only a few doors away from his apartment to keep him company.

As a resident of Oak Village Square, Frank has the support of on-site VOAMI Service Coordinators that

# SENIOR Spotlight



Frank, VOAMI Senior Resident at Oak Village Square

can help him find assistance with anything he needs. He can also participate in any of the activities offered, like card game nights and outdoor gardening, though **what he really enjoys is having the peace and quiet in his apartment – a space all his own once again.** When asked how he feels about his new home, Frank says,

**“VOA gave me hope. This is my first year with stable housing and I really appreciate all that the staff has done for me.”**

# VOAMI Thrift Stores: Shopping for a Cause

## Your purchases benefit more than your style

Volunteers of America Michigan Thrift Stores have more than 3,000 new items on sale daily. These items are generously donated by community members like YOU. **For every sale of donated items, the proceeds support the vital social services in our home communities.**

Anna, who started as a customer at the Lansing South Thrift Store, loved the store so much that she decided to apply to work there. As she celebrates her one-year anniversary at the store, she shares how important the VOA mission is in her work.

“My dad was in the service, as were my brothers. When I found out about the store serving veterans, I knew this was where I was meant to be. **When I am talking or praying with customers, it is my gift. This is my purpose in life, to serve our customers and our community. I’m so glad I work here.**”

Carmen, the Regional Manager, reflects on the joy her role at VOAMI brings her and the difference she sees every day “Shopping at VOAMI Thrift I saw that business could be a true positive force in our communities. From the pictures of social service clients on store walls I could tell my purchases made a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable in Michigan. Taking in donations I witnessed how much is recycled through VOAMI Thrift stores. **Just knowing how many lives we better in our community is so fulfilling to be able to come to work every day!**”

Other VOAMI thrift employees have been with the organization for more than a decade. Sharon has been working on the production team with thrift for over 18 years. She loves that every day is something different to discover, whether it’s a vintage item or something brand new. When she is not sorting items, she loves greeting the “regulars” that stop by.

“We have a lady named, Barb, but we call her the puzzle lady. She lives down the street and comes in every day to get a new puzzle. Everyone knows her and she loves to say hi to us. We know everyone around here and it’s a great community to be a part of.”

Whether you have been on staff for a year or almost 20 years, there is always something new and exciting about thrift. **When you shop at one of the 100% non-profit VOA thrift stores, YOU are helping homeless veterans, aging seniors and families rebuild their lives.**



# Spotlight



Sharon, VOAMI Thrift Store Employee



Anna, VOAMI Thrift Store Employee

**“When I am talking or praying with customers, it is my gift. This is my purpose in life, to serve our customers and our community. I’m so glad I work here.”**

- Anna





# OPERATION BACKPACK

## Students ready to succeed

### YOU provided school supplies to homeless students

Thank you, thank you, **THANK YOU!** Your support and dedication to helping children in need made a huge impact in your community. Your gift showed students you believe in them, and it gave them the confidence needed to succeed. Because of you we surpassed our goal of **2,000 backpacks** and finished the campaign with **over 3,000 backpacks** distributed.

Every time they use their new backpack, they will be reminded they have people in their corner.



**3,023**  
Students  
Served



**423**  
Caring  
Donors



**\$27,076**  
In Monetary  
Donations



**135**  
Districts  
Supported



## Did you know?

You can continue your impact by leaving a gift in your will for Volunteers of America Michigan.

- Please send me information on how to continue my impact by leaving a gift in my will.
- Please call me to discuss leaving a gift in my will for Volunteers of America Michigan.  
My phone number is: \_\_\_\_\_  
The best time to call is: \_\_\_\_\_
- My employer offers matching gift funds. Enclosed is the appropriate form from my Human Resources Department.



MICHIGAN

**Thank you for keeping hope alive in your community!**

Your gift is tax deductible as a charitable contribution. All gifts received are used where most needed to help care for people in need throughout the year.

## You can heal their broken hearts and bring the joy back to Christmas.

Christmas is the most joyous time of year for many, but for those impacted by poverty, loneliness or grief it can be the saddest. Year after year the holidays come and go, and people right in your backyard continue to struggle. Children wake up on Christmas morning feeling forgotten with nothing under the tree. Seniors spend Christmas alone and become further isolated. Homeless veterans who served our country feel overlooked. Instead of feeling Christmas cheer, these neighbors feel isolated and disheartened. YOU can change the outcome for your neighbors this holiday.

## How to get involved

### Donate

Donate online by scanning the QR code, visiting the website or by mail with the form below.

### \$50

could provide a homeless **VETERAN** a gift basket and holiday treats

### \$100

could provide a **CHILD** warm winter clothing and a new toy

### \$150

could provide three **SENIORS** a gift basket and holiday treats

### \$250

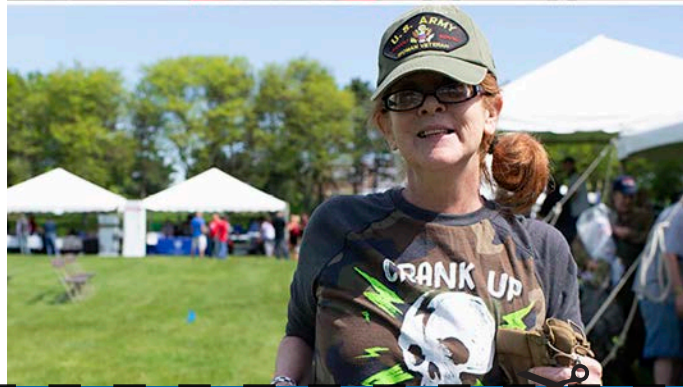
could provide a **FAMILY** of four children warm winter clothes, gifts and a holiday meal

### Adopt

Children, Seniors & Veterans are available for adoption. Visit [voami.org/holidays](http://voami.org/holidays) to view adoptee profiles today.



# HEART OF THE Holidays



# Give the gift of Hope

## YES! I want to give a real Christmas miracle!

Enclosed is my tax deductible gift of

\$250  \$150  \$100  \$50  \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to make this a:

monthly gift  annual gift  one time gift

Donate by:

Cash  Check  Credit Card (Donate online)



To learn more, donate online or become a sponsor, scan the QR code or visit: [www.voami.org/holidays](http://www.voami.org/holidays) or call (248) 353-4862.



# HOUSING Spotlight



State Representative Angela Witwer & Lisa Smith (VOAMI)

## Delta River Senior Village 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Our Delta River Senior Village recently celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Lisa Smith, Community Administrator of Delta River didn't want the day to pass without a celebration. She spoke to her senior residents and soon there was a party planning committee that met weekly. The event was Luau themed and the decorations did not dissappoint. Smiles, laughs and conversations could be heard and seen as the residents gathered in celebration in the community room of Delta River for a potluck and a performance by a ukulele band. State Representative Angela Witwer even presented us with a special tribute to honor the contribution of Volunteers of America Michigan to the Lansing community and the great service provided to our residents.



# YES! I want to help seniors, families and veterans thrive!

Enclosed is my tax deductible gift of

\$250  \$100  \$50  \$25  \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to make this a:

- monthly gift
- annual gift
- one time gift

Check Enclosed

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

To donate online visit us at  
[www.voami.org](http://www.voami.org) or scan  
the QR code below.





21415 CIVIC CENTER DR. SUITE 306  
SOUTHFIELD, MI 48076

**Volunteer with us**

volunteers@voami.org  
248-204-6042

**Schedule a tour**

kbenton@voami.org  
248-204-6034

**Planned Giving**

kbenton@voami.org  
248-204-6034

**Donate your vehicle**

carshelpingpeople.org  
1-800-552-1515

**Thrift pick-up**

866-333-8281

**Visit our website**

www.voami.org

**Follow us on social media**



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Volunteers of America Michigan

# HOLIDAYS OF HOPE

DRIVING CHANGE IN MICHIGAN  
DECEMBER 2 | 2023

*At Holidays of Hope, **YOU** have the chance to drive change for Michigan's most vulnerable and to help our neighbors rebuild their lives with dignity.*

**SATURDAY | DECEMBER 2 | 2023**  
STARTING AT SIX O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

**M1 CONCOURSE**  
1 CONCOURSE DR, PONTIAC, MI 48341

[www.voami.org/holidaysofhope](http://www.voami.org/holidaysofhope)

**Scan to become  
a sponsor or  
purchase a ticket!**

