

Stronger Steps

Summer 2026



Taking Stronger Steps Together

See how Stepping Stone Medical Respite is helping people experiencing homelessness take stronger steps towards healing, hope and stability.

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Our Mission

The mission of Stepping Stone Medical Respite is to provide a safe and healing environment for individuals experiencing homelessness who need to recover from illness or injury. While providing respite recovery, we seek to foster community connections that will promote stable housing, recovery and independence.

32

Residents
Received Care

21

People
Connected to
Housing

300+

Rides to Medical
Appointments Provided

SERVICES



Communal
Spaces



Private
Bedroom



3 Meals
Daily



Case
Management



Laundry
Access



Phone and
Computer Access



Medication
Management



Transportation to
Medical
Appointments



A Letter From Our CEO

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Stronger Steps, the newsletter of Stepping Stone Medical Respite!

As I sit down to write this, I am filled with gratitude and amazement at how far we have come in such a short time. We have now been open to residents for 10 months, and during that time we have served 32 individuals as they recovered from illness, injury,

and other significant health challenges.

While numbers tell part of the story, they don't capture the true impact of this work. What encourages me most is that of those who have discharged from our facility, all but five have transitioned into housing. For those experiencing homelessness while trying to recover medically, stable housing is often one of the most important determinants of long-term success. Seeing our residents leave not only healthier, but with a place to call home, is a powerful reminder of why this ministry exists.

These first months have been an incredible season of learning. Like any new endeavor, we quickly discovered that some of our original assumptions were right; others needed adjustment. We have changed the way we do things multiple times as we have learned from our residents, our staff, our partners, and our experiences. Each adjustment has helped us better serve the people entrusted to our care.

None of this would have been possible without the countless people who have helped bring this ministry to life. From healthcare partners and community organizations to volunteers, donors, churches, board members, and supporters, every person has played a role in helping us build something truly special. We simply cannot thank you enough for your faith, encouragement, and generosity.

Perhaps the most surprising and beautiful lesson we have learned is that our residents become much more than just people staying at our facility. They become family, not only to our staff, but to one another. We have observed firsthand how well a communal, almost monastic style of living works for many of the people we serve. Residents support each other in remarkable ways. They notice when fellow residents don't look well, seem unusually quiet, or aren't acting like themselves. Those observations can be critically important when people are recovering from serious medical conditions. Beyond that, they create a sense of belonging that many of our residents have not experienced in a very long time. We are currently exploring potential opportunities to support this approach beyond their time at our facility.

Finally, I want to express my deepest thanks to our community. Your support has touched the lives of every person who has walked through our doors. It is truly remarkable to witness the transformation that takes place between the day we pick someone up from the hospital and the day they leave our program. Thank you for being part of this journey. Thank you for believing that every person deserves the opportunity to recover in a safe, supportive environment.



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Respite in Action

Case Management

My name is Jana, and I have had the privilege of serving as a Case Manager at Stepping Stone Medical Respite (SSMR) since we opened in October 2025. I earned my Master of Social Work from Florida State University and my Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Mary. Before joining SSMR, I gained valuable experience in corrections and long-term care, which provided a strong foundation for supporting individuals with complex medical and social needs.

In my current role, I work alongside individuals experiencing homelessness as they recover from hospitalization and begin taking steps toward a healthier, more stable future. I help coordinate medical care, connect them with community resources, and help them navigate the path to stable housing.

SSMR has had the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with our community partners, strengthening collaboration and expanding access to services for our residents. Through teamwork, compassion, and a shared commitment to our mission, we have celebrated 20 residents transitioning from medical respite into housing.

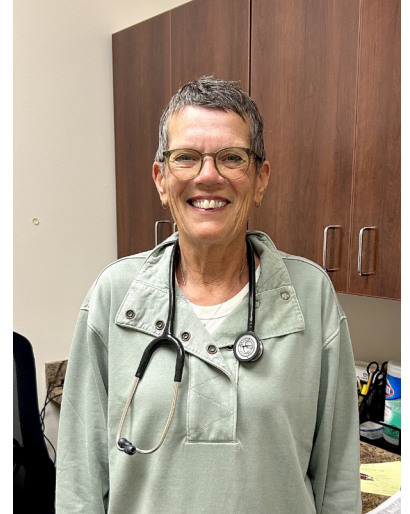
Although SSMR has only been operating for a short time, we have already witnessed the incredible resilience of our residents and the life-changing impact of compassionate, collaborative care. I am grateful to be part of the SSMR team and look forward to continuing to serve our residents and community.

Our Unexpected Volunteer Deb Houdek, PA-C

Sometimes the greatest gifts come in unexpected ways. When Deb Houdek, PA-C, retired from the North Dakota State Penitentiary and approached us about volunteering as a primary care provider for our residents, we never imagined how impactful her role would become. Having a healthcare provider as part of our operating model was not something we had ever considered, yet today we cannot imagine our organization without her.

Deb brings extensive medical knowledge, experience, and compassion. She takes the time to understand our residents' needs, ensuring they receive thoughtful, personalized care and attention. Her dedication has certainly improved the quality of life for our residents.

Alongside Public Health Nurse Jodi Bender, Deb has become an invaluable member of our team. Together, they provide exceptional support to our residents while also educating and mentoring our staff. Their willingness to share their expertise helps us better understand and respond to each resident's unique healthcare needs.



We are incredibly grateful for Deb and Jodi's commitment, kindness, and servant hearts. Their contributions remind us that sometimes the people who make the biggest difference are the ones who simply step forward to help.

Meet Mike

At the beginning of this year, a 63-year-old man named Mike came to our facility. Years of alcohol addiction and periodic homelessness had taken a significant toll on his health, leaving him to battle chronic pain, high blood pressure, atrial fibrillation (AFib), COPD, and other serious medical conditions. Beyond the physical challenges, the disease of alcoholism had also stolen much of his joy and hope.

Over the course of his life, Mike attended many rehabilitation programs. Some he completed, and others he did not; however in early January, he successfully completed what he hopes will be his final stay in treatment. Once his addiction was no longer masking his medical needs, his health problems rose to the surface, ultimately leading him to SSMR.

When Mike first arrived, he spent most of his time sleeping and had very little energy for social interaction. It took some time, but eventually we got to know the real Mike—and what a gift that has been. Mike is incredibly funny and brings joy to everyone at SSMR. He always has jokes to share and is often found helping in the garden or working on creative projects. Mike played a key role in building our outdoor gathering space and garden, nurturing plants from seeds into beautiful flowers and vegetables.

Over the past seven months, Mike has developed a completely new outlook on life. This is the longest period of sobriety he has experienced in many years, and his health has improved dramatically. Since his arrival, our team has helped him attend more than 60 appointments, including medical follow-ups, AA meetings, physical therapy sessions, and other supportive services.



“With all that has been given to me, I will not let it go to waste. It has saved my life.”

Together, we are building a network of resources and relationships that will ensure Mike does not have to face life's challenges alone. As he prepares for the next chapter of his journey, we are confident he has the tools, support, and determination needed to maintain his sobriety and continue embracing his newfound freedom.

When asked about his experience at SSMR, Mike shared:

"It has been a blessing. With all that has been given to me, I will not let it go to waste. It has saved my life."

Outdoor Healing

New Outdoor Space and UMary Physical Therapy SOLE Project

When Stepping Stone Medical Respite first opened, our focus was clear. We wanted to provide a safe and welcoming place to help people experiencing homelessness heal and recover after a medical crisis. Since opening, we have encountered many barriers to recovery, including transportation challenges, mental health struggles, and the trauma associated with living on the streets.

The idea for this outdoor project began with a need for a garage. During the icy winter months, safely getting residents, many of whom use mobility devices, in and out of our vehicles was a challenge. A garage would provide a safe, covered path for residents traveling to appointments, along with much-needed storage space for donations and supplies. As plans for the garage began to take shape, the vision for the surrounding space quickly grew into something far beyond what we had initially imagined.



That vision became reality thanks to Blue Cross Blue Shield's Impact Grant, and a dedicated group of University of Mary Doctor of Physical Therapy students. As part of their SOLE (Service-Oriented Leader and Educator) project, the students partnered with SSMR to transform our outdoor space into an extension of the healing environment we provide every day. Throughout the summer, PT students, volunteers, residents, and staff worked together to create gardens, a quiet meditative space, and a walking labyrinth.

Today, the project is complete, and the result is a beautiful outdoor retreat where residents can enjoy fresh air, build community, care for gardens, and find moments of peace during their recovery.

We are incredibly grateful for the time, creativity, and compassion that everyone involved invested in our mission. This project has left a lasting impact, creating a space that supports healing of both body and mind for years to come.





Volunteers

46+
Volunteers
Served Our
Mission
This Year

Since opening our doors, Stepping Stone Medical Respite has been blessed with an incredible team of volunteers. Our mission calls for people willing to step

beyond their comfort zones and open their hearts to individuals who are often overlooked or rejected by society. Every volunteer who walks through our doors becomes more than a helper, they become part of our family. We are deeply grateful for each person who has given their time, compassion, and talents to serve our residents.

One volunteer we would especially like to recognize is Connor. As a young man in his twenties, Connor may not fit the typical image people have of someone spending their free time

serving those experiencing homelessness, but his dedication has been extraordinary. He found Stepping Stone Medical Respite after making a New Year's resolution to volunteer more, and since January, he has faithfully shown up every Tuesday.

Connor has become a valued member of our community, building relationships with residents, facilitating games and activities, and pitching in wherever help is needed. Whether recruiting friends to lay sod and move rocks for our outdoor space or organizing a Mardi Gras bingo night, he is always willing to lend a hand. More importantly, he has formed genuine friendships with residents that have even extended beyond their stay with us. Connor has helped make our facility feel more like home. We are honored he chose Stepping Stone Medical Respite for his volunteer service.

Donate

Donations play a vital role in helping us provide quality care and services to our residents. We gratefully accept both monetary donations and in-kind contributions of needed items and supplies. Every gift, no matter the size, makes a meaningful difference. To make giving easy, you can use the QR code on this page to make a secure donation or mail a check directly to our organization. If you have questions about donating or would like more information about our current needs, please contact our Outreach Coordinator. Thank you for supporting our mission and helping us continue to serve those in our community.



Scan the QR code to see our website and make an online donation

Get Involved

We are looking for dedicated volunteers to help support our mission. If you have a skill, talent, or service you would be willing to share, we encourage you to get involved. We are especially in need of volunteer drivers to help transport our residents to and from medical appointments. If you are interested in volunteering or would like more information about how you can help, please contact our Outreach Coordinator.



Contact Me

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Join Us For Our 1 Year Anniversary Celebration

Thursday, October 1
4 - 7 pm

112 S 24th St
Bismarck, ND
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Join us as we celebrate one year of hope, healing, and compassionate care.
We're honored to celebrate with the people who make this mission possible.

Thank you for being part of our supportive community.