

Our Daily Rest helped more than 200 this year

By Stephanie Jadrnicek, December 25, 2015 in **The Journal SENECA** — Terri O’Conner loves her new life.

She’s one of the 219 people Our Daily Rest has sheltered during 2015. O’Conner was escaping from an abusive situation when she came to the shelter. But with the help she received from Our Daily Rest, she quickly regrouped and got her life back on track.

“Terri was like a shriveled flower when she came here,” executive director Lauren Richardson said. “She had really closed in on herself the way a flower folds in — she was in protective mode.”

O’Conner had already lined up a job before arriving at the shelter in April, but she knew she’d need assistance to get back on her feet again. Richardson said O’Conner is a very hard worker.

Aware of O’Conner’s love for gardening, Richardson contacted the Episcopal Church of the Ascension in Seneca about getting a plot in the community garden for O’Conner.

“She would work all day and go dig in the dirt all evening,” Richardson said. “She just continued to open up and blossom.”

O’Conner was the last person to receive rapid rehousing from Our Daily Rest — a form of assistance with security deposits. Since June, she’s continued to not only support herself but also reconnect with herself, redefining her way of life.

“She has a great sense of humor now and a smile that lights up the world,” Richardson said. “The other night she texted me to tell me how much she loves her new life. It’s not without its struggles — as we all have struggles with budgets — but she’s enjoying herself, she’s found a church she likes, she’s got friends and she’s reconnecting with her family.”

Our Daily Rest isn’t the kind of shelter where a line of people stand out the door waiting for a place to lay their head for the night. It’s an emergency shelter with a transitional program, which Richardson said sets it apart from other shelters but also lends itself to misunderstanding.



With the help of Our Daily Rest’s transitional program, Terri O’Conner is back on her feet and enjoying her new life.



Our Daily Rest has provided assistance to more than 200 people throughout the course of 2015, though executive director Lauren Richardson said the organization is still in need of donations to continue its mission.

“We have a program by which people who really want to be self-sufficient again have 60 to 90 days to find a job, save money, get connected to the services they need and get any debts paid off they need to pay off while they don’t have any overhead.”

Folks are fed dinner every day at the shelter, and with all of the food donations Our Daily Rest receives, there’s plenty to eat for breakfast or pack for lunch.

The shelter can only house about 35 adults, and anyone interested must go through an admission process. Every Wednesday afternoon a caseworker offers an open intake.

“We’re going to have them fill out an application and take a drug test, (and) we also do a sex offender check and a criminal check,” Richardson said. “We’re not looking for traffic violations — we’re looking for those things that wouldn’t work well in a communal living situation where there are men, women and children.”

Once all the checks are completed, the case manager interviews the applicant. Together they discuss whether or not the applicant is a good fit for the shelter and whether the shelter is a good fit for the applicant.

Richardson said although some generous donors have given food, clothing and items, Our Daily Rest is not near its mark for the end of 2015 — and expenses continue to rise.

“We’ve cut our expenses as much as possible — there’s no fluff here. We’ve compensated by operating with such a small staff,” she said. “But my job as executive director is to even out the peaks and the valleys in our giving cycle so we don’t get into those challenges over the coming years.”

She hopes more donors offer what they can so Our Daily Rest can continue to assist those in need. Her greatest joy comes from talking to former clients when they return to visit. Two of this year’s graduates have bought houses, and many have reconciled with their families. Another is getting custody of her children back from the Department of Social Services. And then there’s Rick, who asked that his last name remain anonymous.

When Rick came to the shelter this year, he was estranged from his family and had made some mistakes along the way. But Richardson said Rick hit the ground running. “From the day he walked in the door until the day he left, he was applying for jobs. He was as helpful and pleasant as the day is long,” she said.

About one month before Rick left the shelter, a company out of Kentucky flew him in for an interview. Two weeks later, he bounded into Richardson’s office with an offer letter.

“That’s rare here. I’ve had Ph.D.s in here and I’ve had people with a sixth-grade education, and everything in between,” she said.

Rick received an offer for a substantial hourly rate and even a relocation allowance. An electrician by trade, he’s now in Kentucky earning a living wage. He recently expressed his appreciation to Richardson. “God is good,” he said. “He has literally worked a miracle in my life — going from homeless to having the job of my dreams. I appreciate you and this place.”