

In This Issue

Director's Letter, 1 & 2
Staff Spotlight, 3
3rd Quarter Donor List, 3 & 4

THE HOT LIST

We currently need:

Warm Blankets

New/Gently Used



Socks

Thick, warm socks



Hats

All Sizes/Styles



Bar Soap/Body Wash

Any brands



Lotion

Prefer tubes



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Reflections and New Beginnings

Happy New Year!

The ending of each year always comes as a surprise to me but it shouldn't. Each year has 12 months with 365 days and yet the year, weeks, months, and days slip away like dust in the wind. As the past year ends and the new year begins, I like to sit and reflect on all that has happened throughout the year.

When looking back on the year, sometimes there are regrets. Regrets I did not use my time wisely, some missed opportunities and even time missed with family and friends. I often question if there were more things we could be doing to help the kids at Rock House Kids. For example, wanting the doors of Rock House Kids opened right after school so they have an immediate safe place to go for a couple of hours before our programming starts.

There are memories that bring smiles, tears, and some that even take my breath away. Last year was no different.

In January of 2019, Rock House Kids acquired the final section of our building. Dreaming and planning began on how the space could be used to help the children, as our vision statement says; *Meeting the physical, emotional and educational needs of inner-city children by instilling hope in a safe Christ centered environment.*

We decided to work on meeting the educational needs first by providing them a computer lab. Unfortunately, many of the children at Rock House Kids are not working at grade level. They don't have the tools they need to complete their schoolwork and many struggle with basic reading and math skills. As I watched the lab transform from a worn out space with a tattered ceiling to a bright, warm, functional room with new flooring, drywall, ceilings, and bathroom, I got that "take-my breath away" feeling. I'm so excited to experience the "Dream-Big" moments bloom in front of my eyes.

There have been many ups and downs. We've heard many stories of children who are hurting and broken. We learned from a third grader she was being touched inappropriately by the mom's boyfriend who is a registered pedophile. The boyfriend is now in jail, and we all breathed a sigh of relief; until we found out mom is waiting for him to get out of jail so they can move out of the area. Thankfully, the third grader is still attending Rock House Kids where she can smile, laugh, and play without fear of being hurt. She is a bright star even though her world is trying to take away her shine.

We've had teenagers come and tell us how their parent doesn't want them in their house anymore. They're kicking them out to the streets. They've been called degrading names and harmful actions have been taken against them.

But there's more than just stories of sadness and pain. There are the many stories of lives being changed. Lives that are given hope. We had a senior graduate from high school in spite of the many challenges standing in his way. By staying focused and determined, he accomplished his goal of graduating with his classmates. Many of our teens have found jobs. This can be a mixed blessing because now we don't get to see them as often, but we are proud they are learning skills and responsibility. They still check-in to give us updates and check on us. Sometimes they stop in for a quick visit on their way to or from work. They ask us to come to their place of employment while they're working so we get a chance to see them in action and we are fortunate to continue that connection.

We have met hundreds of new people. People who have found out about us through their civic groups, church groups, or even found us on social media. We've had the pleasure of people coming in for tours of the facility, new volunteers who worked with the kids and new partnerships developed. Many churches have come in and given of their time to run special event nights for the kids. We have even had a HUGE blow up ship slide for the kids to play on!

continued ►

Reflections and New Beginnings *(cont.)*

There was a welcome back to school cook out with an event night where the kids were able to enjoy snow cones, eat fresh popped popcorn, and nachos in a bag. They love to eat! Another highlight was when over 30 kids had the opportunities to see plays at Rock Valley College Starlight Theatre because of someone who donated tickets specifically for them. This was an opportunity many of the kids would not have had otherwise.

I believe in 2020, there are going to be even greater DREAM-BIG experiences. Don't get caught saying "I've been meaning to", or, "As soon as I get _____ done". I've been there and I must keep myself in check daily. It is so easy to react when a kid is misbehaving. But when I take the time and leave the reaction at the door, I find that many of these behaviors are rooted in the things that tear at your heart; Broken families, absent fathers, abuse. Every "I've been meaning to" is a missed moment where you can make a difference in a kid's life. Every "As soon as I get _____ done", is an opportunity passed by to engage with a kid that may only need a listening ear.

There is a power in presence. It doesn't take any special skills, degrees, or a lot of money in your wallet to make a difference in a kid's life. It only takes a willing heart and the ability to say "yes" to an adventure that awaits you.

Dee Lacny, Executive Director

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!



YES! I want to help Rock House Kids!

- I want to be an **Angel of Love!** Please send more information.
- Use my donation of \$ _____ where most needed.
- My donation is in honor of: in memory of:

- I would like information on volunteering.
- I/My group would like to provide a hot meal. Please call me.
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Thank you!

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: Deanna “Dee” Lacny



We normally feature a volunteer or group every month in our Volunteer Spotlight. We thought it would be a good idea for you all to get to know the staff at Rock House Kids too. We are starting with our leader, Dee Lacny, aka “Ms. Dee” to the 250 kids here at RHK, where she also knows ALL of their names. She started her journey with Rock House Kids in May 2014 as our bookkeeper and has held several positions since her start. In January 2015, she served a dual role as Office Manager and Program Director where she was able to put together a comprehensive and successful curriculum that changed the way inner-city kids at Rock House participate in the program. In August 2015, she was honored to step up to the newly created position as Chief Operating Officer (COO). In 2017, she also made the decision to become a licensed pastor when one of our kids was being held at the juvenile detention center and she couldn’t see him even though the parent gave permission. “It was a terrible feeling not being able to get to one of our kids who needed to know they are loved despite their poor choice.” From that point forward, Dee knew it was a must to become a licensed pastor because nothing was going to get in the way of helping one of our kids in a time of need.

In January 2018, Dee became the Executive Director. When asked what it is like to be the Executive Director, Dee is humbled and tries not to think about all the responsibility the title holds from keeping the utilities on and the building safe, the heavy burdens the kids are enduring, to keeping RHK relevant so the kids keep coming because we want them to succeed. But what does success look like at RHK according to Dee? Success is “when a kid you have not seen in awhile walks back through RHK doors and wants to share details of their life with you. Success is a child being able to freely be a kid for three hours a night and not worry about what is on the other side of the door in the real world. Success is knowing the kids are safe and out of harm’s way while they are here. Success is when a 5th grader asks for a Bible and comes back the next week and asks for a notebook to go with the Bible.” Dee also knows she is not doing this alone. From the Board of Directors, staff, volunteers and community, she feels we are all in this together to make RHK an awesome place for kids to come to be nurtured, mentored, loved and believed in!

Dee was born and raised in Berwyn, IL. She went on to pursue her academics and received an Associate’s Degree in Accounting and from there her Bachelor’s Degree from Northern Illinois University where she majored in Finance and minored in Economics. She holds several certifications which include Non-Profit Management, Trauma-Informed, CPR, Mental Health & First Aid. Her next certification will take place in February, where she will become Crisis Prevention certified.

Dee came to the area 30 years ago with her husband, Mike, where they raised three children; Brandon, Stephanie and Megan. She also has three dogs. Princess, a former dog of one of our kids, is pictured above and is the mascot for Rock House Kids. She visits us several times a month.

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